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The Sign of the Seven Sharks

by Charles F. Oursler

"UNDER A MASK," by Crittenden Marriott, Will be the Feature Story in No. 13.

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The Sign of the Seven Sharks

A STORY OF KEEN DETECTIVE WORK.

By CHARLES FULTON OURSLER

CHAPTER ONE

A MYSTERIOUS RUBY

"SHE has the most terrible face I have ever seen."

The speaker was Mildred Carson, the nurse in charge of Ward D of the Emergency Hospital. She looked earnestly and with some fear up into the face of Doctor Cairns. They were standing at the entrance of the ward, and the young physician was gazing half-way down the double line of cots, where an old woman lay muttering and moaning.

"You say that she promised you good fortune?" the physician asked.

"She gave me this," answered the nurse.

From her bosom she drew forth a small package wrapped in paper, which she tore open nervously and held it up for Cairns to see. It was a beautiful red stone that glowed with strange, mysterious fires under the rays of an electric light over their heads.

"As perfect a gem as I have ever seen in my life," he exclaimed, holding it admiringly at his finger-tips. "You know, precious stones have been a sort of hobby with me. I love to study their characteristics. This is really most extraordinary. Where on earth did that ugly old crone get a stone like this, for I miss my guess if it isn't worth many thousands of dollars. I'm ready to swear this is a genuine pigeon-blood ruby."

Mildred Carson impulsively caught Cairns' arm and quite abstractedly he placed his free hand on it to reassure her.

"I must give it back, then," she whispered. "I had no idea it was a real ruby. She made me promise her not to let any one come in to see her, and then she gave me this. I'll——"

"Wait a minute, please."

Cairns had caught her gently and held her as she was about to return to the bedside of the old creature.

"There's something so unusual in all this," he explained, "that I think we ought to find out something more about

it. Before you return this precious drop of crimson stone to that old hag, who will never know what to do with it, tell me how she came here."

Mildred Carson explained that the crone had been knocked down by an automobile that afternoon as she was crossing Albemarle street, which is one of the principal arteries of Misery Flats, where the Emergency Hospital is located. She had been knocked unconscious and was brought in a police ambulance to the hospital, where she was placed on the operating-table.

"She has a wooden leg," added the nurse, "and this gave a twist as she was crossing the street. But when they examined her in the operating-room they found a very peculiar thing. Come down to her cot with me. I want you to see it."

The handsome physician and the beautiful dark-eyed nurse made a striking picture as they passed quietly between the two rows of small white beds, each with its burden of poverty and suffering. They stopped at the bedside of the old woman, who had given Mildred a ruby worth a small fortune, and who lay now in a sort of delirium, staring angrily at the ceiling. They listened to her ravings.

"Punch!" the old woman cried. "Eh-ah, you did right, Punch. We fooled 'em. They'd have gotten you, if we didn't; they'd have sucked your blood, Punch, and left you dry; they'd have stuck you in the dark, Punch. Never mind, Judy looked after ye when ye were gone. Judy knew; Judy was too cute for 'em—for any of 'em. Do you hear that, Munks? Let the skulls rot and the bones rot and your brains rot with them. Judy fooled every last one of you."

Here a spasm of coughing shook the old woman, who, by her ravings, seemed to have introduced herself as Judy. But she was not done; as soon as she was quiet, she began talking again.

"'Member their song, Munks?" she asked. "Eh-ah, but can't you see 'em at the headquarters a-singing it? How did it go, now? Eh-ah, I know:

"'Of bones and skulls we'll make our feast,
Tra-la! La-la-la! La-la.
With blood for water and bones for yeast,
Tra-la! La-la-la! La-ah-la!'"

Cairns shuddered at sight of the fearful leer which distorted her face as she rattled out this pirate-like ditty. He bent lower to study the face which the nurse had said was the most terrible she had ever looked at. He confessed to himself that Mildred had been right. This old woman's face was a page on which black tales had been traced in cryptic furows and shadows. To one who held the key to that cipher there must be a strange history there, waiting to be translated. Thus Cairns reflected as he watched her. The small, glistening eyes of the old woman turned their gaze from the ceiling and toward him.

She fixed her gaze on him, but she did not see him. Her eyes looked over his shoulder and lighted up as they saw Mildred Carson.

"Eh-ah, there's the good girl!" she croaked in feeble glee. "There you are, my honey. I've took a liking to you, sweetie. I can trust you; I wouldn't trust nobody else but you. You take care of Mother Judy now, and the whole world won't be too much for you to own, my dear. You can buy the whole of it, if you want, when Mother Judy's gone."

Mildred glanced at Cairns as if to signal that she was still raving; but Cairns had become greatly interested. Here was an old woman, who, his medical experience told him, was fast dying in the most miserable poverty, taking a sudden fancy to a nurse and giving her a pigeon-blood ruby. Behind that, what might not be hidden?

"Let her go on," urged Cairns in a low whisper. "Ask her if there is anything you can do for her now."

Mildred took the trembling yellow hand of Mother Judy and sat beside her. "You know, Mother Judy," she said in her calm, soothing voice, "I promised you this afternoon I would let no visitors come to see you, if you did not wish them to. That was what you were most anxious about, wasn't it? You were afraid some one would come to see you. Well, no one shall come to see you, if I can possibly prevent it, I promise you. Is there anything else you would like?"

"Eh-ah!" The old woman turned her head laboriously, as if to see if there were any one near. Then she looked steadily, with that strange, fixed stare, into Mildred's face. "I'm afraid!" she cried hoarsely. "I'm afraid of a tall, fluffy white-haired man with a twitching eye. Watch for him! Keep him out of here; don't let him get to me. You'll be rich, honey, if you keep him away from me."

Mildred made a sign to Cairns as she released the hand of Mother Judy and began readjusting the neck-fastenings of the old woman's gown. In doing this, Mildred just for a moment intentionally exposed the breast of the patient, and Cairns caught a glimpse of the thing the nurse had wanted him to see.

It was a red scar, shaped like the figure 7. Coiled about its staff was a tattoo of a shark, the head of which rested on top of the staff, with its mouth open and fangs like a serpent spitting venom.

In the short sight he got of it, Cairns saw that it had been done with a rude sort of artistic skill, and he realized that the old creature, on some day long past, had undergone acute agony when the Seven and the Shark were scarred and branded in fire on her bosom.

"Try to get some rest now, Mother Judy," soothed Mildred, adjusting the covers nicely around the palsied frame and smoothing the wrinkled forehead. "Try to go to sleep. You needn't worry about anything in the world."

When they had returned to the door which opened on the outer hall, Cairns turned a puzzled and thoroughly interested gaze on the little nurse, who looked up at him as if he should be able to explain everything about the old woman without any further delay.

"By George!" cried the physician. "Losarn should know about this."

"Who is Losarn?" asked Mildred.

"My former mathematics professor. He's a criminologist, too, and often helps the police. He fell off a cliff and broke both legs, and now he can't move out of his wheeling-chair. But this mystery would certainly appeal to him."

Then, with a sudden, quick thought, Cairns asked:

"Does any one else know about all this?"

"No one knows about the ruby, except you and I," answered Mildred; "but the evening papers have an account of her accident, and the reporters described the sign on her breast very vividly."

The doctor's hand swept impatiently across his brow.

"Did you ever hear of anything like this before?" he demanded more of himself than of the nurse. "An old woman gives a nurse a ruby. On her breast is a queer sign of a Seven and a Shark. She promises riches to the nurse, if the nurse will keep away from her all visitors, and especially——"

But Cairns was not able to finish the sentence.

Mildred had caught his arm and was pointing down the hallway. A man was coming toward them. He was very tall and his face was hawk-like. His eyes had the gleam of a hungry wolf. His manner was austere, and his white hair was tossed up like waves over his brow.

His face was turned toward them, and as he came nearer they could see that his right eye twitched.

CHAPTER TWO

MOTHER JUDY'S SECRET

THE stranger was completely at ease. He was dressed all in black, with a flowing black silk cravat arranged in an old-fashioned bow, and his manner, now that he approached the physician and the nurse, was bland and self-possessed.

"I beg your pardon," he began, bowing before them with an elegant poise, "but do I have the honor of addressing either the superintendent, or the head nurse?"

"I am the superintendent," answered Cairns.

"Doctor Franklin Cairns—yes? Well, how peculiarly fortunate is that circumstance. Indeed, Providence has aided me. I thought, you know, that possibly—at this hour, you see—it might be difficult to find the superintendent. I am overjoyed. I want to get permission from you, if I may, of course, to take a look at one of your patients."

Cairns was trying to gain time, in order to decide what it were better to do. He gazed thoughtfully at the wolf-eyed stranger for a moment, and then asked:

"Which patient? Here in Ward D, where the sick and dying of the slums of Misery Flats are taken, we have many."

"A Mrs. Sullivan, I believe," answered the stranger. "Perhaps I should first introduce myself. I am Eric Walker, the novelist. Yes! I am not personally interested in this Mrs. Sullivan. No; not at all. She is the mother of my wife's maid, and she has disappeared. Yes! We read in the paper to-night that an old lady had been injured and brought here and that no one here knew who she was. So we imagined, or hoped, you see, that——"

"There is an old woman here. You may see her."

Cairns interrupted the soft, suave monologue of the white-haired stranger with a business-like air. Mildred looked up at the doctor in some astonishment. Both she and Cairns had heard the old woman's plea to be spared the sight of the man who answered the description of this visitor to the minutest detail. His eye twitched as he looked at them now. Mildred was convinced he was the man Mother Judy dreaded more than anything else in the world.

"That is kind—exceedingly kind," gushed the stranger, rubbing his hands together and smiling effusively at Cairns.

"Come with me," invited the latter, with an assumed indifference in his tone which was well counterfeited. He darted a glance at Mildred which was meant to tell her not to worry, that he had well planned what he was set on doing.

"I will show you our old woman," added the physician, "and you can see if she is your Mrs. Sullivan."

As they walked down the ward aisle, Cairns drew a little behind the man with the twitching eyes. He wanted to watch and not be watched during the little scene about to transpire.

"Hers is the third cot ahead of you now," prompted Cairns, as the visitor hesitated. "That is the patient."

The bland stranger, with a mincing air noticeably and apparently intentionally exaggerated, walked up to the cot of Mother Judy. Her back was to him, and she did not know any one was there.

"I have the honor to wish you a very pleasant good-evening, Judy, and to express my commiseration for you in your present trouble, and the trouble ahead," said the white-haired man. His tone was oily, but the last phrase had all the sting of a threat.

With unexpected energy the old woman turned in her bed and confronted him. Fear crept over her face, mingling and striving there with consuming rage and passion.

"Munks!" she gasped, with a rattle in her throat.

The man surveyed her broodingly, menacingly, triumphantly. He folded his arms and glared at her with that calm repose which is felt by those in whose hands are power and final victory.

"After thirty years, Judy," he grated out at last. "After thirty years! My regrets for your present accident, I say; my condolences for the future. I have the honor to wish you a very pleasant good-evening."

The old woman sank back moaning to her pillow. Munks turned from her bedside and walked briskly back to Cairns.

"I have made a mistake," he said with a cordial smile. "Much as I should have wished it to have been the absent Mrs. Sullivan, my eyes tell me your patient is not she. This old woman is a raving maniac. I shouldn't pay any attention to what she says, eh, doctor?"

"Not at all!" answered Cairns with a slight smile, and he who had been called Munks bowed himself out and away. Cairns has never forgiven himself for thus having allowed him to get away. If, with the eye of prophecy, the physician could have seen into the events, the shadows of which were even then thrown all around him, he would have held Munks there, or else have followed him, if necessary, to the ends of the earth. But Cairns was not a prophet.

He returned to Mildred, who had been called to the bed of another patient. In a few words he had explained to her why he acted as he did, and what had occurred.

"I have been and am still convinced," he told the nurse, "that there is some big mystery behind these singular occurrences. That was why I allowed this man Munks to see the old woman. I want things to develop. Surely, there won't be anything serious, and I am quite anxious to know what it is all about."

"I wish that Munks man had never come here," replied Mildred with an icy little shiver. "I don't like his twitching eye; and it was so strange——"

"Strange," admitted Cairns, "that he should have come in here, just after she had been talking about him. But it might be just——"

Two orderlies, carrying a stretcher, interrupted him. They were bringing in another victim from the streets of Misery Flats. She was a young woman, who had been taken suddenly ill on the street. Her face showed unmistakable signs of a life of dissipation and privations. They gave her a cot close to where Mother Judy lay, muttering and clutching at her coverlets.

Before they could resume their conversation, a fresh and more startling interruption came. Mother Judy sat up in bed, despite the pain of her injuries, and called to Mildred.

"Nurse," she cried, "come here quick, honey nurse!"

"Go down to her," urged Cairns, for Mildred had hesitated. "Let me know exactly what happens."

Mildred went down to the old woman and gazed sympathetically into her burning eyes.

"I suppose you're angry at me, Mother Judy," she said; "but the white-haired man with the twitching eye got in to see you when I was engaged and was not at the door. Some one else was guarding the door."

Mother Judy held up a shaking hand. "You couldn't have stopped him nohow, honey," she gabbled. "Hell couldn't stop Munks when he gets started—not Munks. No! But I'll fool him yet. That's what I called you down here for. I'm going to fool Munks and all his bunch. I told you I would make you rich, and so I will. Come down here, honey nurse."

Mildred bent low her head, so that the old woman's thick, crusting lips were close to her ear. Mother Judy was talking now in a hoarse, deep whisper.

"There's treasure hidden," she began—"treasure enough to load a pirate ship."

Mildred glanced apprehensively at Cairns, who stood watching them in the doorway. All the mystery was beginning to touch the nerves of the little nurse, and she longed for the protecting presence of the big, handsome doctor. But he nodded his head reassuringly, and she looked back at Mother Judy.

"The swag of the Seven Sharks," gurgled the old woman. "It ain't hid so deep you can't get it. For thirty years it's been tucked away and nobody—nobody but Judy the wiser. Judy knows. Munks would like to know, and so would the rest of his bunch; but I've sworn he shan't get it—he nor none of 'em. I know I'm going to die; so Judy's going to give you her secret, honey nurse. You will be the heiress pretty to the swag of the Seven Sharks."

"Please, please," urged Mildred, "I don't want to know!"

"Eh-ah! Don't be afraid, little honey nurse. They'll never know I told you; they'll think when I died the secret died with me, and they'll give up the hunt. But even if they did, they could never find it. Only you shall know where I've hid it, and you shall not know till I'm gone. Here!" She fumbled in her bosom and drew forth a folded, tattered piece of paper. "There!" she cried with a sigh of relief. "Now you've got it. That'll tell you what to do. That's got in it the secret I've kept to myself for nearly thirty years. Keep it close, and the day you know I'm dead, open it and the treasure's yours."

The old woman was exhausted now by her exertions and dropped back, panting for breath. Mildred drew the covers tenderly about her and thanked her; but her mind still refused to believe. The idea that a real fortune awaited her, to Mildred, was too preposterous. She believed it all the raving of delirium.

But she made up her mind to do what the old woman asked. She would not look at the note as long as Mother Judy was alive.

Thus engaged, Mildred had not watched Cairns. He, from his distant post, could not, of course, hear what had passed between the nurse and the crone; but he had seen strange things.

When Mildred came to him a moment later and told him what had passed, when she gave him the paper and he tucked it away in a pocket for safe keeping, and when she related the promise she had made, he was still silent. He did not tell Mildred what he had observed.

He had noticed that the girl, who not ten minutes before had been brought in on a stretcher, had turned in her bed so that she could watch all that Mother Judy did. She had stolen to the edge of her own bed and leaned far out, resting herself awkwardly on her hands spread on the floor. She had heard all the old woman had said to Mildred.

And when Mildred had returned to Cairns the girl's eyes had followed her with a sullen, menacing gleam.

CHAPTER THREE

THE SHRIEK IN THE DARKNESS

CONVINCED that the game he had been watching was rooted far below the surface of things, Cairns now resolved that he would play a lone hand.

Though he realized that he might be mistaken, that the girl whom he had detected listening might be only an ignorant and curious girl, he did not believe this to be the case. He believed it was more than accident, or sudden illness which had brought her to the Charity Ward of the Emergency Hospital. So Cairns resolved to wait watchfully for further developments and be ready.

Yet, even he could not remain on guard all the time. The hour now being eight o'clock, it became necessary for the physician to leave the ward, with only Mildred in charge, so that he could complete an elaborate and rather useless system of reports required by the hospital board of directors. This work he did in his private office, which was on the first floor, below the ward where Mother Judy and the girl who had listened were quartered.

"Watch carefully!" Cairns admonished Mildred, and he took her hand and pressed it earnestly. "Behind what we have seen and heard here to-night there is a mystery deeper than we can even guess at. I feel sure of that. I feel sure that something is going to happen. For the next hour and a half I will be in my office down-stairs. I will leave my door open. If the least thing goes wrong, call me at once and I will be up those steps in a jiffy. You will be sure to call me, Mildred?"

In reply the little nurse gave him her hand in a free, trusting gesture that set the heart of the young physician beating several degrees faster than its usual rate. With a smile and with a heart a little less troubled with foreboding, he bowed and left the ward.

Once in the quiet of his office, with its ticking little desk-clock, its batches of charts and forms and letters, Cairns found it exceedingly difficult to concentrate on his work. It was a cold evening late in the winter, and the boisterous wind shook the windows behind their red portières as if in rage. The crashing of the trees below the window and the shrieking of the wind around the corners called up all his fears. He felt the shadow of impending evil. The sinister face of old Mother Judy would intrude itself before his gaze as he bent low over his reports, and then the twitching eye of Munks and the suspicious eagerness of the girl would fill his mind with vague, fantastic doubts and fancies. His thoughts would go playing leap-frog in the darkness, while his fountain-pen made a little round blot on the paper where he was working.

Out of this reverie Cairns was summoned suddenly and with startling distinctness. The physician's eyes were on the little desk-clock when it came. The hands were pointing to ten minutes after nine. A death-like quiet had hung over the hospital. Then the spell of silence was broken.

There was a wild, agonizing shriek. Cairns had never heard its like before. It came from the ward overhead—from Ward D—where Mildred was. It mounted higher and higher like the shrill, tortured cry of the banshee. Twice it broke on the stillness.

Then Cairns, rushing out from his office like a madman, heard a new cry:

"Doctor Cairns! Doctor Cairns! Quick! They've——"

It was Mildred's voice, and it ceased suddenly. With long, swift jumps the physician leaped the stairs leading to the ward. There was no sound now, except the noise of his own footsteps. When he reached the head of the stairs, he stood lost in amazement.

He was in total darkness. Every light in the hall and Ward D was out, and from the ward came now the queer, strange moans and cries of the frightened sick. Delirious old men and women and frightened children were calling loudly for doctors and nurses and lights.

"Mildred! It's Cairns calling you! Where are you, Mildred?"

There was the tremor of genuine alarm in Cairns' voice as he cried out this loudly, so that he could be overheard above the cries of those in the beds. But no reply came. Mildred Carson did not answer, though Cairns called again and again.

Then the physician thought of the electric switch and darted across the hall to where the button was. He pushed it in and out again without effect. The lighting system would not work, and the calls from the ward were getting louder. Cairns could hear orderlies and nurses, roused from their rooms in other parts of the building, hurrying to the darkened ward.

Fumbling in his pocket, Cairns found two matches. With these he felt able to solve the situation, for he knew there were gas-brackets as well as electric lights in Ward D. He stepped into the room where confusion was now rampant, and after blundering around in the dark, found a chair. This he dragged to the middle of the aisle and climbed upon it. Then he lit a match.

As the little flame flickered above his head, Cairns caught a momentary, frightful glimpse of the room filled with scared, emaciated faces of the sick and the dying. But not until his unshaken hand had applied the match to the gasket and the feeble, flaring flame had cast a flickering, uncertain illumination around the ward did Cairns see the dreadful secret of the darkened place.

Mother Judy had been murdered. The old woman lay exposed on her bed. The covering had been thrown to the floor, as if there had been a quick, sharp struggle; and Cairns, still standing on the chair gazing down at the pitiful figure, saw that a dagger had been plunged into her breast, just where the red Figure 7, with its interlacing of a blue, spitting shark, had been scarred.

On the face of the dead old hag there was an expression of grim terror and despair. Her eyes, though glazed now in death, reflected a passion of horror, which seemed to have been caught and held in the grim sculpture of death. Her hands were spread wide, as if in her last struggle she had pleaded to be spared.

Shaken at what he saw and filled with darker doubts springing from what he had seen before, Cairns looked to the bed where he had seen the girl listening. As he had expected, that bed was empty.

Then Cairns turned to face orderlies, internes, nurses and several patients gathered in a shocked group at the door.

"Have any of you seen Mildred Carson?" he asked.

But Cairns knew what their answer would be. He knew when he saw the dagger in Judy's breast that Mildred was in the power of Munks and those who served him.

CHAPTER FOUR

CAIRNS LEAVES AT MIDNIGHT

IT was an undertaking of the greatest difficulty to get a coherent idea of what had occurred from the vastly excited patients of Ward D.

Cairns, determined to be master of the situation, determined to take the reins of himself and those around him as well, silenced his own fears and anxiety while he sought to find some tangible clue.

He believed he understood in some measure at least what had occurred. For revenge, or for some other reason equally potent, Mother Judy had been killed by some of her old associates. That was a matter entirely for the police.

The big fact to Cairns was that Mildred Carson was in the clutches of men who had not balked at murder. The thought was appalling. It was the first time the young doctor had ever admitted to himself that he loved Mildred; but now the consciousness of her peril forced the truth home. His heart swelled at the thought of what she might then be facing.

"That girl they brought in here knew Mother Judy had given Mildred a paper containing the secret of the treasure they're after," said Cairns to himself. "The treasure is real, then. They have kidnapped Mildred to get that secret out of her, and she, brave little girl, would rather die than give in to them. I know she would."

Feverishly he set to work questioning the patients. From bed to bed he went. Some of the patients told him wild, impossible, irritating things. Cairns would then pass on to some more level-headed persons, from whom he would get a fairly coherent account. In this task he was assisted by other orderlies and internes. When half an hour later they had made the rounds of the ward, they gathered at the door and compared notes.

They found that to all intents and purpose this had occurred:

Just about nine o'clock several of the patients saw a strange man in the hall. His face was very red and his head was bald. He was short and inclined to be stout. He had come down the hall on tiptoe, close to the wall where the electric switch was located. They saw him take a penknife and work at something in the wall.

The next instant the entire ward was thrown into darkness. Some of the patients said they heard several persons running up and down, and one or two whispered words, very excited. Then several long-drawn screams came from Mother Judy's bed. These screams, which had brought Cairns to the floor, had terrified every one in the room.

Two patients told Cairns they distinctly heard a commotion at the lower end of the ward, and they also believed they had heard an automobile chugging away, just before Cairns had lighted the gas. From this window a broad fire-escape led to a lawn below.

Faced with these facts, Cairns was forced to admit his own helplessness. Out of a mysterious past, of which he had no sources of information, had suddenly appeared a strange old woman, fondling a ruby and then giving it away. On her trail had come presently the man of whom she lived in mortal fear—Munks—with the eye that twitched. He had threatened her, veiled under condolences, and shortly after his departure the assassin's knife had done for her. And in that same dark moment the girl who was now more to Cairns than all the jewels of the Orient had been snatched away.

"I can see no place to begin," murmured the young doctor. "Where under heaven can I look for Mildred Carson? Send for the coroner and the police," he finally told Bailey, one of the most promising of the young internes. "Let them take charge of this gruesome business. Meanwhile I am going to have a look around."

Cairns had always cherished a secret admiration for his own powers of observation and had believed that he could do wonderful work if confronted with a murder mystery. He was now speedily disillusioned. All his love for Mildred spurred him on now; but he could find nothing to point the way to finding Munks.

The knife claimed his first attention. It was an ivory-handled affair, carved in the fashion of the early Wu dynasty, such as one will see frequently in the temples of the lower Chinese provinces. The blade was long and sharp, and it had been plunged with great force into the breast of Judy.

"That was not the blow of the girl who listened, at any rate," reasoned Cairns. "Only a man, and a powerful man at that, could strike such a blow."

Then Cairns passed to the window, where two of the patients had heard a commotion. Here a very plain story was written in the muddy feet on the fire-escape outside, the upraised window and the tracks of an automobile on the lawn beneath.

"A thing quickly, desperately, but efficiently planned," thought Cairns. "I am up against a brainy gang, with unlimited courage and ferocity. They must have had a man of genius to plan this. I wonder if the genius is Munks?"

Involuntarily Cairns shuddered. The idea of Mildred Carson being in the hands of Munks was so revolting to his instincts it was maddening to contemplate.

He formed a new resolution there on the instant.

"This is a case where only a genius greater than the genius guiding this gang can win out," he said to himself. "If the police try, they will fail against such intellectual odds; and if I try I will fail. But there is one who is greater than they. I will tell this story to Losarn."

And so it happened that, after Cairns had answered all the questions of the men from headquarters, had given them full rein to pursue their investigation and was himself released from any further immediate interrogation, the young doctor wrapped himself in his heaviest overcoat, and, setting his teeth against the storming midnight wind, set forth for one who could solve the problem.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE MASTER OF GRAY GABLES

ON a high hill, ten miles out from the city, there is an old colonial house, surrounded by tangled woodland and approached only by a small path, which winds upward through a maze of wild growth which has not known a scythe in a hundred years. It is called Gray Gables.

Not many people ever get near the place, because it is far from the suburban car-lines and the automobile roads, and few of those who notice the gray-gabled oof, from which its ancient name is derived, ever venture to ascend for a closer inspection. It is a house of mystery to most of those who inquire about it, for there is none to tell them to whom it belongs, or who is its occupant.

It was to this house that Cairns had decided to go.

Though it was midnight and bitter cold, the anxious young doctor knew very well delay would be dangerous, if not absolutely fatal. Just as he would counsel an immediate operation for a patient with an inflamed appendix, so he counseled for himself in his present perplexity an immediate journey through the bleak night.

For Cairns was certain he would find aid in unraveling the terrible enigma which now confronted him from the master of Gray Gables.

A few blocks below the Emergency Hospital, where the tide of Misery Flats and its neighboring slums flow over into the lower part of the business section, Cairns found a taxicab making its way back to a hotel-stand farther uptown. Hailing this, he gave the driver quick, precise instructions.

"I want you to drive out the Monastery Road," he said, "until you reach the Old Jug Bridge. Turn down the small wagon road there and continue until you come to a wooden bridge crossing a tiny stream. That's where I want you to stop. I will leave you there, and I want you

to wait until I come back. I may be an hour or more, but I will be back."

Before the chauffeur agreed to these conditions, which were not agreeable in such bitter cold, he wanted to know about the terms. Cairns gave him a bill of large denomination and told him to hurry. Within five minutes they were coursing through the upper apartment-house district and, soon speeding over the big bridge, found themselves on the open Monastery Road.

Cairns was very cold in the car, but he did not have time to think of his discomfort. His mind was racked with anxiety, and he searched his brain for some means of getting on the track of the criminals who had now involved his dearest interests in their scheming.

How could Munks be traced? As Cairns reflected over what had happened, he realized there was no clue, absolutely no trace which he could discover, by which he might set to work. No one knew where Mother Judy had lived; in fact, from what he had gathered, Cairns was sure that was a secret even Munks did not know. Munks himself had appeared suddenly, like a gaunt apparition, in the hospital; had bowed with the ease of a Chesterfield and vanished into the night again, no one could tell where. Then hands had struck in the dark and there had been murder done; hands had reached out in the dark, and Mildred had been caught in their clutches. Cairns could see no way to start searching in the mad maelstrom of a city full of people.

"And the police!" he fumed within himself. "They will never find them."

Cairns, it will be noticed, had read more of the police than he knew about them.

Just then the auto lurched to a stop, and, as Cairns threw open the door, he found himself at the little rustic bridge, which is immediately below the hill on which Gray Gables is built. He jumped out with alacrity, and, shouting to the chauffeur to make himself comfortable until he returned, set out to climb the hillside.

It was treacherous business at midnight. The moaning wind, sweeping over the trees and the undergrowth, chilled him to the heart, and he was panting and exhausted when, after half an hour, he reached the summit and saw a light gleaming behind the red curtains of the mysterious mansion.

To see it was a distinct relief, not only from the physical discomforts Cairns had suffered, but from another cause as well. He had the eerie sensation of some one watching him in the gloom—a ghostly feeling which the cheerful, lighted house now chased away.

With eager steps Cairns hastened up on the porch, and, seizing the knocker, beat against the paneling in an excited little tattoo. Once it had sounded, he had not long to wait.

The door was opened by a huge black man in white, flowing robes of the East, who made a sweeping Oriental obeisance before Cairns. Then the black man stood back erect and solemn, while Cairns, nodding hurriedly in reply to his greeting, entered the hallway.

It was a fascinating place, that hallway. The walls were hung with an extraordinary array and mixture of treasures of art and of sport. Precious miniatures hung as neighbors to trophies of jungle-chases, Western exploits and tropical hunting journeys. Losarn, the master of Gray Gables, as Cairns knew well, had been a cowpuncher, an African hunter and an artist in the Latin Quartier—a many-sided man who excelled in many different accomplishments.

For these trophies now, however, Cairns had no eyes. He turned to the black man and said:

"I must see your master, Rakko. I must see him at once on urgent business."

"The worshipful exceller of the stars and the moon, the peer of the sun, is waiting to see you, most excellent one," answered Rakko with another salaam.

Somewhat startled at the reply, Cairns glanced at the black man, but his strong, impassive countenance told him nothing. The physician followed the servant down the long hallway to a mahogany door, which was closed.

The black man rapped, and, on hearing a low reply, opened the door and entered. For a few seconds Cairns was left alone. Then the door swung slowly backward. Cairns crossed the threshold.

The room into which he entered was lighted by a single lamp, which glowed like a jewel in a luxury of rich shadows. It was swinging gently, and its rays fell slanting, revealing the face of Losarn.

It was a strong, finely chiseled face, unnaturally pale, and traced with the unmistakable signs of suffering. The countenance was turned toward Cairns, but the eyes were closed.

"Good-evening, Doctor Losarn," said Cairns rather awkwardly.

The man's eyes opened slowly. They were set deep, and in them glowed the fires of a great dominant, unconquerable soul.

"Cairns, I'm glad you came," said Losarn in his low, penetrating voice. "You have done right to come. There is only one man in the world who can and will help you to-night. There is only one man in the world who can help you find the murderer of Mother Judy. There is only one man who can pick up the trail of the unspeakable Munks. There is only one man who can restore Mildred Carson to you. I am that man!"

"Good heavens!" gasped Cairns. "How under the sun do you know all about this?"

But Losarn, beneath the lamplight, only smiled.

CHAPTER SIX

MURDER BEFORE MORNING, UNLESS——

"BE seated, my dear Cairns," resumed Losarn, after allowing the impression of his first little surprise to settle upon his visitor. "There is a comfortable chair just to your left."

The physician sank into the arm-chair and gazed into the ascetic face of the singular man before him. Losarn had the most inscrutable countenance he had ever seen. His faith bounded high just at sight of him. But he was speaking.

"Before you give me the details," he said, "with which I am not as familiar as I desire to be, I wish you would answer one question. Why did you come to me to-night?"

"Well," explained Cairns quickly, "when you taught us psychology at the university, you used to tell us your theories of criminology, and since then I've heard that whenever the police get stuck on a problem they come to you, and you help them solve it. So you were the first man I thought of."

Losarn smiled. "You know I am in a wheeling-chair?" he asked, and when Cairns answered that he had heard of an accident, the old man continued: "Ah, yes; that fall which made my legs useless for the rest of my life was a boon in its way. I have to sit down all the time, and my mind is sharpened. In my arms, though, there is the same old vigor, boy. I'm as strong as ever, except for my legs; but they've sharpened my mind. Bound to this chair as I am to-night, unable to walk like other men, I am still the deadliest enemy to the Seven Sharks in all the world!"

"The Seven Sharks!" echoed Cairns.

"Aye! You shall hear all about them presently."

Rakko brought hot drinks to Cairns, and the invalid closed his eyes. When he spoke again, his voice broke dreamily on the silence, as if it came from a long way off. It reminded Cairns of the voices of spirits he had heard at mediumistic séances.

"The Seven Sharks," murmured the voice, "were a gang of ferocious robbers, all the more terrible because they were all brainy people. They were organized thirty years ago. They played for no small stakes—not they. In one haul they got bullion to the value of half a million dollars.

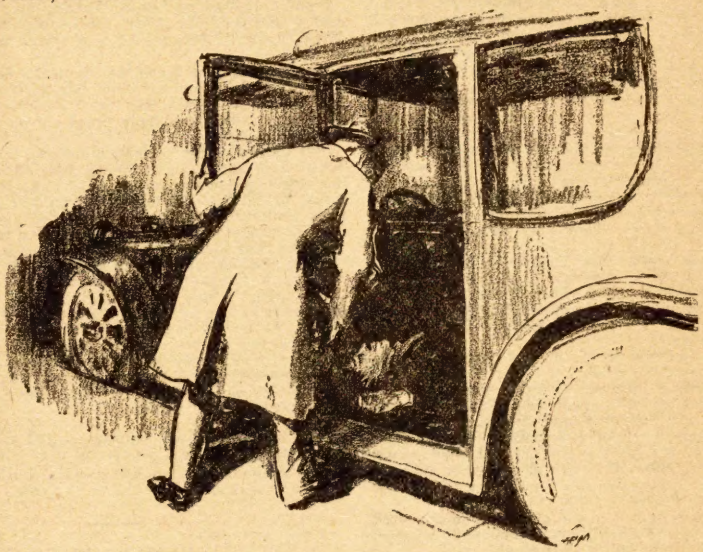
"Punch was their king and Judy was his queen. Then there was Munks, and Ace Wood the gambler, and Arrington Parr, and Muffin, and one other. Have I forgotten?

No! The last they called Rigoletto, from an opera, because he was a hunchback. I never knew his other name. Of course, they had other tools, but only these seven had the sign of the Seven and the Shark on their breasts."

Losarn's voice died away dreamily and they sat silent for a moment. Soon it came back again like a truant ghost.

"The trouble came five years after the crowd had united. In those five years they had made wonderful crimes and had always eluded detection. Every one of the gang was known to the police, but they could always manage to prove they were not concerned. One daring crime would follow another and leave the men at headquarters baffled and beaten. Nothing was too frightful for these seven. Murder and blackmail they used to advance their main business, which was robbery. Then came the famous Jacobi jewel robbery.

"Old man Joe Jacobi, one of the best friends I ever had in the world, then owned the greatest private collection of jewels in America. He gave me this amethyst you see on my right little finger. Punch murdered Jacobi one pleasant autumn afternoon and then walked boldly down his front steps ten minutes after the killing, with all the Jacobi jewels in a suitcase.



On the floor of the cab lay the body of a man

"Now, the stories that come to me differ here. My information has come from the streets of the underworld, where some of my agents have gathered what facts they could. One version is that the gang had planned to knife Punch and his wife and take the spoils for themselves, out of revenge for Punch's domineering cruelty to them. If this story is true, Punch and Judy were too quick for them, and got away. The other version is that Punch and Judy decided treacherously to keep it all for themselves.

"At any rate, Punch and Judy disappeared on the night of the crime. Two days later Punch was killed in a railroad wreck near Macon, Georgia. Mother Judy completely disappeared, and with her the Jacobi ten-million-dollar jewel collection. For twenty-five years she has not been heard from or seen by those most interested in finding her. But to-day——"

The old man had relapsed again into one of those spells of silence which were characteristic of him. Cairns respected his whim, and presently he resumed:

"To-day the five remaining members of this school of deadly Sharks had an opportunity of revenge and for regaining their treasure, for which they have been waiting so long. From wherever her hiding-place had been all these years, Mother Judy at last rashly ventured into the street and was promptly knocked down by an automobile. She was carried unconscious into your hospital, and the sign on her bosom was described with gusto in the evening newspapers.

"When I read that account, I was certain trouble was brewing. Munks would see it, I was convinced, if Munks were still alive. So I took measures to keep myself informed. I telephoned a young reporter friend of mine, who has helped me before in some little private inquiries, and told him to let me know at once if anything transpired at the Emergency Hospital. Not half an hour ago he told me Judy had been murdered and a nurse kidnaped. I asked who the superintendent was, and I was then certain you would come to me.

"There now," he concluded murmuringly, "you know what I know. Tell me now in chronological order all the details."

As rapidly as he could, Cairns related all that had transpired. Losarn was tremendously interested in details which, to the physician, were of no significance at all.

"What became of the knife?" was one question. "What did it look like? Where did they take the body? Did you see what kind of paper Judy gave Miss Carson?"

These and a good many other queries Losarn asked Cairns, without waiting for the young doctor to answer them. He was shaping the problem in his own mind, and was not seeking any advice from his guest at all.

Then, after a protracted silence, words came from him that sent Cairns reeling to the lowest depths of despair.

"Undoubtedly this paper," said Losarn, "which Mother Judy gave the nurse, contained the secret most valuable to the Seven Sharks. I mean that it must reveal the hiding-place of the Jacobi jewels. To get that paper from her, Munks and his crew would stop at no indignity, no atrocity, no torture. But should she, under press of violence, give up the paper, she will be no safer than if she refused, or had hidden it away. Munks will fear that she, too, has seen the hiding-place. He will fear she can give evidence to the police. No! Munks will take no chances now. They will murder Mildred Carson before morning, unless——"

"Unless what?" groaned Cairns.

But Losarn had dreamed off again into silence.

CHAPTER SEVEN

HAUNTING EYES

LOSARN did not keep Cairns long in suspense. Pointing his finger at the doctor through the eerie shadows, the professor summed up the situation in short order.

"Until Mother Judy's secret is wrested from Mildred

Carson, her life is safe," he said; "knowing that, we have grounds for hope. Munks and his henchmen, I know, have sworn eternal fealty each to the other. They are united for the purpose of getting that treasure. Munks will not break faith. If he can get his share of the loot, he will be willing to divide with the others, rather than risk the vengeance of his comrades. Punch was a bolder man than Munks; but Munks is shrewd, and he has an even chance of winning out.

"In this confidence I have in Munks' fidelity to his comrades, I find the only hope for saving the treasure from the thieves and of rescuing your friend, Miss Carson, from an unthinkable fate. This is the idea:

"In the last twenty-five years, through my agents, I have done my best to keep a watch on the members of the Seven Sharks, because I was sure that some day this matter would come to a head. I lost track of Munks, but I have kept Ace Wood and Arrington Parr pretty well under my eye. Wood is a gambler, and is usually seen around saloons; Parr is a stockbroker, with offices downtown.

"Parr is our real clue. On his breast is the sign of the Seven and the Shark, and they dare not proceed without him, nor would he dare ignore a summons, should a meeting be called. Now, no sooner had I read that item in the evening papers, describing the sign on Mother Judy, than I set to work to locate Mr. Arrington Parr. To my immeasurable relief, I found that Mr. Parr was in Washington and was expected to return to the Pennsylvania Station about three o'clock to-morrow morning.

"That is our only hope. They may have wired Parr, and he may know exactly where to go and what to do when he leaves the train. But I doubt it. Sending information like that in a telegram is a risky business. What is more probable is that he has been sent a message to return instantly, and that one of the Sharks will meet him when he arrives. On that supposition I am basing my plan of campaign."

Cairns shifted excitedly in his chair. "We can arrest them, then and there!" he cried.

"Not at all!" blazed Losarn. "What a fine trick that would be. Forgive me, if I speak impatiently, but you are dealing with criminals who have brains, not a crowd of cheap second-story men or pickpockets. Arrest Parr and whoever meets him at the station, and what would you have against them? No! In this game we take no chances. You must excuse me now for a moment. I want to show you some pictures."

Losarn pressed a button, and the giant Rakko appeared on the instant. The professor directed that he be wheeled to another room, and Cairns was left alone.

In silence he sat there, fretting against every moment of inaction and delay. It was a long ride back to the city, and if he were to meet the Washington train in Pennsylvania Station, he had little time to waste. He tried to comfort himself with the reassuring thought that the congestion since the war made all trains late, and he might not miss it, if Losarn would only hurry.

Then a singular sensation began creeping over him. It was an unaccountable feeling, for Cairns was not an imaginative man. He began to feel as if some one were watching him. Yet he was certain there was no one else in the room, and the idea persisted. Great eyes, which he could not see, but whose intent, malevolent gaze he could feel, seemed piercing his soul through the darkness. Cairns shook himself.

"My nerves and loneliness," Cairns told himself, and drove off the impression with an effort of his will.

Presently Losarn was wheeled back into the room. Gathered in his lap were some sketches in charcoal, and one or two wash drawings.

"My dear Cairns," Losarn said, as Rakko placed him just below the light again, "I have many times been thankful for the artistic gifts which I inherited from my father. It was he who encouraged me to cultivate my talents for drawing and painting. You may well suppose that even I, for all my labors as an amateur criminologist, could never secure even so much as a snapshot of any one of the Seven Sharks. But here is a set of drawings and sketches I have made of the most celebrated criminals of my time, and among them are most of the Seven Sharks. I made these from memory. Here, for instance, is Sandlewood Shum, a notorious Pekin strangler, whom I sent to the electric-chair. For that Inspector Edgewood got all the credit and was promoted. Edgewood is one of my best friends.

"Well, here is Mr. Arrington Parr. Study him well. You will recognize him when you see him an hour and a half from now."

Losarn held up the sketch. It depicted a man of handsome face, but with crafty eyes that betrayed a covetous, crooked nature. It was the kind of a man for whom women would give their all, and get blows and curses in return.

"And here," added Losarn, holding up another—a charcoal portrait of the finest craftsmanship—"here is Ace Wood, so-called because he is a prince among the gamblers."

The face of Ace Wood was typical. Small, hawk-like, with white hair and piercing eyes behind spectacles, he had the sleek, clerical air which shrouds the knavery of many men who earn their bread by nimble fingers and doctored cards.

But Cairns suddenly stopped noticing the picture of Ace Wood. He sat straight in his chair, staring down at a drawing exposed on the knees of the invalid. It was a large, brutal face, denoting the wildest daring and the most unalterable purpose in its rugged lines.

"Who is that?" asked Cairns, pointing to the picture.

Losarn was silent for a moment. Then he asked queerly: "Why, Cairns, why do you ask that?"

"Because," answered the physician, with an embarrassed little laugh, "I have had a really strange feeling since I have been in this room. It seemed to me as if some one were close on my heels; as if some one were glaring at me, regarding me with a terrible, settled malice. I did not see the eyes; I merely felt them. But those were the eyes!"

He bent forward and rested his finger on the portrait on Losarn's knees. The laugh of the master of Gray Gables broke eerily on the stillness.

"That man?" he cried. "No! Not he! That is the picture of one of the most dangerous criminals who ever lived! But rest assured, it is not he!"

And again Losarn laughed and his mirth had a diabolic ring to it that chilled Cairns to the core.

CHAPTER EIGHT

NOT A DELUSION

IT was no time to worry about premonitions and supernatural things.

Cairns took the two pictures and studied them, fixing every detail in his mind. When he arose and stood waiting for final instructions from Losarn, he was certain he could now recognize Ace Wood and Arrington Parr with reasonable accuracy. And he felt sure there would be only a small crowd at the railroad station at that hour of the morning.

Losarn had suddenly grown very serious. "The police will be at your disposal when you need them," he said. "You will have every assistance. I wish you would be guided as far as possible exactly by my instructions. When you pick out Parr and the man who meets him, make yourself inconspicuous, so that you can follow them without being observed. Arrange to have a taxicab waiting for you near all four sides of the station. In that way you will not lose a second. You may depend on it, they will have a car in waiting, unless their headquarters are quite close to the station.

"Trail them to wherever you go. When you see them safely admitted into their headquarters, get to the nearest telephone and inform me. In the meantime, I will have arranged matters so that you can succeed along the safest

and most dependable lines. But one thing I ask of you. When you rescue Mildred Carson—and you are going to rescue her, God helping us against these fiends—ask her for the paper which Mother Judy gave her. Don't open it. Bring it to me at once—unopened, please."

Cairns promised. He shook hands effusively with the calm Losarn, and Rakko showed him to the door. As he was leaving the room, Cairns turned and caught a parting glimpse of the professor. His face had undergone in an instant an extraordinary transformation. The calm repose was there no more. Instead, the face bore every sign of intense mental struggle and concentration. The brows were knitted, the eyes tightly closed, the lips drawn down in fierce determination.

Something new was being revolved in the mind of Losarn. The professor was trying to untangle some fresh and important knot he had found in the problem.

But Cairns was glad to get away. He was eager for action. He had been glad to get the professor's advice; indeed, he realized that without it Mildred would have been altogether at the mercy of her abductors. But he wanted action now. Cairns was an athlete; Cairns was a surgeon; Cairns fretted and fumed when he had to wait.

So he was glad to hear the twist of the engine-crank and the purr of the motor, and he was glad to feel the lurch of the cab as it swerved under the guidance of the chauffeur. The latter had been glad to see Cairns return; he said gruffly that he was glad to be on his way back to the city, for it had been a cold job waiting inside of a cab.

Left to himself in the car, Cairns was more hopeful. Always an optimist, he began to regard himself as riding on his way to a sure and easy victory. He fashioned in his mind's eye a plan of events as they should happen, if his hopes came true. He saw himself single-handed saving Mildred Carson from her captors and marching the remaining members of the Seven Sharks down to police headquarters, with the Jacobi jewels under his arm.

While thus engrossed pleasantly, he was suddenly chilled. Sometimes a dog, dozing before the hearth, will suddenly start up, as if disturbed by some strange, unseen thing—some cold breath from another realm. The psychics say it is the feeling of contact with disembodied entities outside of this world.

That was exactly how Cairns started now. Reveling in his roseate dreams, he was suddenly chilled to the heart, and started forward with a surprised little gasp. The very roots of his hair were cold.

Surgeons are not impressionable, and Cairns tried to pull himself together. He determined to overcome what he insisted were silly impulses, springing from nerves strained to too great a tension. But, try as he would, will as he would, he could not rid himself of the idea that eyes were on him again.

Cold, penetrating eyes seemed watching him as he sat there alone in the cab, racing toward the city. He stood up, catching at the curtains to steady himself. He peered behind him, looking out of the little window, to see if any one were clinging to the back of the machine and watching through the little window over his head. But there was no one there.

Still unconvinced, Cairns groped about in the darkness of the cab, feeling every corner to see if some one were in hiding. He even felt the roof of the cab to see if it were solid. But he was the only occupant of the interior of the machine.

Then he made an astonishing mental discovery. He remembered the face—the face Losarn had shown him.

He had seen that face somewhere—not its pictured semblance, but itself. He had seen the bold sweep of those cruel lips, he had seen the defiant glitter of those cold, steel eyes, he had felt the overwhelming force of strength and will of that personality. The eyes on him now, he fancied, were that man's eyes. Somewhere he had seen, had known, had touched the man.

But where?

Cairns looked out of the window. The taxicab was lurching to the curb; they were at Pennsylvania Station, and it was ten minutes before the train was due.

CHAPTER NINE

WHO DID THIS?

CAIRNS gave the chauffeur minute instructions. He was to wait at that entrance until Cairns came back for him. He was to talk to no other person. That was a condition Cairns named on the promise of an extra fee. If Cairns did not show up within half an hour, he was to go about his business. Cairns paid him and hurried on to the next entrance to the station.

Within five minutes the energetic physician had posted taxicabs on the four sides of the big station, and he felt prepared for any emergency. On each chauffeur he had impressed the importance of being ready to get away at once, and each driver had faithfully promised to be ready. So the young doctor felt confident.

As he passed down the steps, Cairns noted with gratification how few people were about. He felt sure he would encounter no difficulty in finding one of the gang there waiting to receive the stockbroker when he got in from Washington. He scanned intently every face as he passed. He took the trouble to notice porters and other station employees, to be sure that he would not be tricked by any Seven Sharks camouflage.

But he was disappointed. Two minutes scouting convinced him there was no member of the Seven Sharks known to him waiting near the gate of the Washington train. Of course, they might be elsewhere in the station, or they might have arranged to meet Parr on the outside. Whatever the plan was, Cairns made up his mind not to be outwitted.

Of one thing he was certain. Parr must come through the gate where Cairns was standing now. A face so strongly characteristic could hardly pass by unnoticed, no matter how tightly muffled the stockbroker might be. The lobby was well lighted, and Cairns settled himself determinedly, with the belief that before five minutes had passed he would be trailing one of the Seven Sharks to the nest where Mildred Carson was a prisoner.

His heart beat faster as the roar of the slowing express came to his ears. His excitement became nerve-racking as he heard the sound of the emerging passengers climbing the stairs to where he stood. But, remembering the part he was playing, he assumed an air of wearied expectancy, as if he were looking for some tardy relative or friend.

The first man up the stairs was Arrington Parr. Cairns could not have missed him. He was a tall, pompous individual, very important in his stride and muffled in a fur coat, the price of which would have fed and clothed a poor family for a year. With a quick, appraising glance at all around him, he strode through the gate.

Cairns noticed this. He was certain Parr had expected to find some one waiting for him, and was surprised that no one had received him.

"What on earth has gone wrong with their plans?"

This question Cairns asked himself time and again as he followed the stately figure of Arrington Parr across the marble floor and up the broad flight of stairs which led to the street. With a bound of satisfaction, he realized that they were moving for the eastern entrance, where the machine which had taken Cairns to Gray Gables was in waiting.

Cairns was about two hundred feet behind Arrington Parr and keeping pace with him; but he did his best to pretend that he had no interest at all in the man ahead, for he well realized that he himself might be spied on in turn. Already he had learned enough of the men against whom he was plotting to understand that their plans were always carefully laid and that he might at that very moment be the object of their surveillance.

As Parr passed out the door, however, Cairns hastened his steps, so as not to lose sight of him. That would have been a calamity, for there would be no way of picking up the trail, if he had lost sight of his quarry for a single moment.

Instead of losing sight of Parr, however, Cairns emerged

from the station to find him playing a part in a swift procession of unexpected happenings.

Parr first stood uncertainly at the curb, looking up and down. Where before Cairns' taxi had stood alone there were now two machines. The new one, the physician guessed, had been sent from the headquarters of the gang to bring Parr to their council chamber.

Now a chauffeur stepped forward and walked quietly up to Parr. He touched his hat, and then, removing it altogether, bowed ceremoniously. To Cairns it appeared as if he were making a signal.

Parr stood very straight and stiff for a moment, and then threw wide his hands and began talking hurriedly. He seemed vastly excited about something. The chauffeur kept bowing and pointing the way to the machine.

Finally Parr got into the machine, the chauffeur climbed back on his box, and away the taxi darted at full speed.

Cairns rushed forward to the second car. He looked on the box, but no chauffeur was there. Then he opened the door of the machine and glanced inside.

On the floor of the cab lay the body of a man. As Cairns, in his amazement, bent lower, he saw that the man's throat was torn with great clawing scratches, and his forehead had been beaten in, apparently with a single, tremendous blow from some blunt, strong instrument.

With an insight and purpose born from a new sudden understanding, Cairns hurriedly opened the collar of his victim and threw aside the upper part of his shirt. What he had half-expected and half-feared to find was there.

The sign of the Seven Sharks was carved and scarred on the man's chest, showing ghastly and grim in the glow of a street-lamp.

Then Cairns recognized the face. He remembered the picture Losarn had shown him—the picture of a gambler. This was Ace Wood.

CHAPTER TEN

A WILD CHANCE

CAIRNS was a doctor. Where another man might have faced defeat in such an extraordinary situation, Cairns saw one tiny spark of hope and fanned it with all his might. With Arrington Parr gone, with no way of finding the Seven Sharks, Cairns made up his mind to do his best to make this one last chance materialize.

He was by no means certain that Ace Wood was dead. Unquestionably the blow had been a murderous one; it was plainly evident that the man who had dealt the blow struck with the hope of killing. But Cairns, schooled in the healing arts, was not yet ready to believe the gambler before him was lifeless.

"If I can only make him live five minutes longer," he thought, as he knelt beside the limp figure; "if there be one spark of life left in him, I may yet win out against them all."

In his inner pocket Cairns found a pocket emergency case, which Mildred Carson had given him on Christmas morning, nearly a month before. He had never had use for it until this moment of horror and uncertainty, and the sight of it recalled with tenfold intensity the thought of the girl, of her peril, and the slender chance he now had of reaching her in time.

This reflection steadied the hand of the physician as he drew out a brandy flask and put it to the lips of the unconscious man. Then he put a vial to his nostrils; and Cairns prayed as he had never prayed before. He prayed that one moment of consciousness be given Ace Wood again. His practised eye had seen that the man's wounds in all probability were mortal. The blow had been fierce and the forehead had caved in beneath its crushing onslaught. Probably Ace Wood would never stack a deck of strippers again. But if there were just a flutter of life left in him, Cairns prayed it might flash up.

Narrowly he watched the bruised and blood-stained face; closely he studied the eyes, alert for one quiver of the closed lids. It seemed an eternity, that vigil; but Cairns was master of himself, and his faith never wavered. And at last he was rewarded by a single sign.

There was a slight twitching of the gambler's eyelids and a slow sigh. Anxious and eager, Cairns bent lower, fanning the face and praying harder and more devoutly that he would return to consciousness. Time was growing so precious.

Presently the sigh came again. The eyelids quivered and twitched and then rolled backward. They revealed a pair of startled, beady eyes that blinked bewilderment up at Cairns.

"Ace Wood," said Carns, "listen to me, and don't shut your eyes. You're badly hurt, man! You're dying!"

The gambler smiled. His voice was very faint and weak, but he answered gamely:

"Can that stuff! I know—I'm just—as much alive as you are."

"Ace Wood, you're dying! Some one struck you," insisted Cairns fiercely.

His words wrought a change in the stricken man. They had called back all that had occurred. The gambler's mouth opened wide and his breath came in great, sodden groans.

"Who are you?" he gasped.

"A friend from headquarters," lied Cairns readily. "Parr hasn't shown up; they sent me here from my house, where they telephoned to me; but they didn't tell me where we are all to meet. I don't know where to take Parr when I find him."

Under the stimulus of excitement the gambler was rallying. He nodded at Cairns' story, but seemed afraid of something, or some one else.

"Where is he?" he whispered hoarsely. "Don't let him know I'm dying. Let him stay here and I'll be safe. Don't let him follow me over there. Keep him away."

Cairns was getting desperate. Ace Wood could not hold out much longer.

"I'll keep him away from you, if you'll tell me where Munks is," he urged. "Tell me where Munks is. If you die and don't tell me where Munks and the others meet to-night, all will be lost."

The gambler looked narrowly up at the doctor, as if he found the promise of comfort in his words.

"You will warn Munks?" he exacted.

"I will do anything you wish," promised Cairns eagerly.

"Then go tell him to get the paper from the girl—at once—and—by all means. Tell him—not to wait for Parr or any one. Tell him—to kill—that girl! Tell him—to run—and hide—or God have—mercy on his soul!"

"Right!" cried Cairns, half-frantic at seeing the man's increasing weakness. "Here, keep your wits! Don't close your eyes, or you'll go off, Ace Wood. Here, swallow this."

Cairns had found the bottle of brandy again, and poured it all down the dying gambler's throat. As new vigor fired the eyes of the injured man, the physician bent low and with the utmost solemnity said:

"You must tell me where Munks is hiding. You must tell me where the Sharks are. If you want me to carry that message to Munks, I must know. I will promise to find Munks, if you tell me where they are hiding."

With his last strength, Ace Wood raised himself a little and said hoarsely:

"You know where the Lafayette Market House is?"

Cairns nodded quickly.

"Well, there's a house of shelter across the street from the market on the East Side. It's a place for bums and downs-and-out. Muffin runs it for graft. That's where we meet to-night. The Firelight Lodging House, doc. The —Firelight—Lodging——"

But Ace Wood said no more. With a sudden spasm of pain, he fell back and life left him.

In Cairns' heartbeats there was a jubilant rhythm now. He had all the information he needed. All that was necessary now was to telephone Losarn as he had promised; to gather the assistance of a squad of bluecoats and then rush down on the Sharks.

As the physician straightened up from bending over the

prostrate figure of the dead gambler, some one touched his arm roughly. He turned and saw a policeman.

"What's all this?" asked the bluecoat threateningly.

"Some one has murdered this man. I have just found him," answered Cairns. "I guess you had better take charge of the case."

"Some one!" echoed the bluecoat with an elaborate sneer. "And you just found 'im? Well, young man, I will take charge of the case and you, too. You can explain your connection with this case down at headquarters."

"But I've got urgent business," protested Cairns.

"Business, hell!" roared the policeman. "I've got urgent business with you!"

He grabbed Cairns' hands, and a moment later handcuffs clicked on the wrists of the young physician.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

ONE OF THE NEW WONDERS OF THE WORLD

ON the night stillness they heard the distant buzzing of a motor. The bluecoat had marched Cairns to a near-by box, where he had called "the wagon," and both he and the physician believed the approaching machine was the van from headquarters, which would first carry the body to the morgue and then the prisoner to the tender mercies of the third degree.

But in this Cairns and his captor were mistaken.

A large limousine rounded the avenue and came to a pause within a few feet of where lay the body of Ace Wood. From the limousine emerged a man, large and with a determined, decisive air. Without hesitation he walked up to Cairns and the patrolman.

"Is this Doctor Cairns?" he asked, as if it were quite proper that he should know about everything and as if the spectacle of a physician in handcuffs was quite an everyday occurrence.

Cairns said he was, and was about to say more, but the newcomer continued:

"Allow me to introduce myself. I am Inspector Edgewood, from headquarters. Officer, take the bracelets off Doctor Cairns. He hasn't done anything wrong. What has happened here?"

"Look at that thing there!" cried the policeman.

Edgewood walked over to the taxicab and looked in.

"Ace Wood!" he cried, and whistled wonderingly. "Some one has done for Ace Wood at last."

And then, as if there were no connection, he turned to Cairns with the remark:

"Do you know that your friend and my friend Losarn is one of the new wonders of the world? Here, officer, send that body to the morgue and notify Lieutenant Ramsay that I have taken personal charge of this case. Then go back to your post and keep your eyes open."

The bluecoat, with an apologetic slant at Cairns, saluted his superior and stood guard over the body. Edgewood, with a friendly touch on Cairns' arm, invited him to a place in his limousine.

"Get some police and drive to the Firelight Lodgings," blurted Cairns the minute Edgewood gave him time to speak.

The inspector turned in quick surprise. "That's where the gang is hiding," rattled Cairns desperately. "They've got Miss Carson there, and——"

"Yes, I know all about that," interrupted Edgewood without ceremony. "Are you sure it's the Firelight Lodgings? Where did you get that tip?"

"From Ace Wood. It was a dying confession," answered Cairns with a tone in his voice that implored the inspector to hurry. The latter's face was set and grim, but his eyes were sparkling with the hope of an early capture. Edgewood was always a man of quick action.

"Drive to the Water street station-house," he called to the chauffeur, and as the car swung around and dashed onward, Edgewood leaned forward.

"There's the very devil to pay in all this business," he said. "The whole thing is one infernal mystery. Let me tell you how I came to your rescue. It'll knock your eye out, man. Not fifteen minutes after you drove away from Losarn's house to-night some one knocked at his door. It was the chauffeur who had driven you out to Gray Gables. While you were talking to Losarn, some one had overpowered him, taken his cap, goggles and coat away from him, bound him to a tree in the woods, gagged him, and then the assailant, impersonating the chauffeur, drove you back to the city."

"Then that was another man who drove me back to the city?" asked Cairns incredulously.

"Exactly! There's some mix-up here I can't dope out. Who in the devil was it, and why should he be so particular about driving you? Soon as Losarn knew of this, he was certain something was going to break, and that you probably would be in danger. He got me on the phone and insisted that I come here personally. He had already acquainted me with the details of some of the plans. I intended making a circuit of the entire station on the lookout for you. But as luck would have it, as soon as I got here I found you. Now what do you know?"

As briefly as he could, Cairns related all that had happened, beginning with the arrival of Arrington Parr and ending with his own arrest by the policeman. The only thing he omitted was the impression of the eyes looking at him in the taxicab. Cairns had not forgotten this, and now that he knew something of the mysterious chauffeur who had driven him, he was certain there was more fact than fancy to the matter.

Edgewood, being essentially a man of action, was eager to get at the raid. He left Cairns in the car when the machine drew up at headquarters; but he was in the office only a very few moments. When he returned, he mentioned only that everything was arranged and that Munks and his gang would not be able to offer effective resistance to the small regiment of policemen who would attack them.

"But we never can tell what will happen," he added, as he passed a weapon to Cairns.

It was an automatic thirty-eight; it was the most wicked-looking firearm Cairns had ever touched. The physician put it into his pocket wonderingly. That was the first time the idea of personal danger had entered his mind through all this fearful night.

Meanwhile the limousine was bounding on to the Firelight Lodgings.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE DOOR OF THE FIRELIGHT LODGINGS

A WALK of five minutes east from the old Builders Exchange will bring one to the squat, ramshackle old shed where the poor of that part of the city buy their produce and meats. This is the Lafayette Market House, and Ace Wood, just before he died, had said that the Firelight Lodgings was near by.

Inspector Edgewood and Cairns left the automobile two blocks away from the market and proceeded to the next corner, where, gathered in the doorways of two tenement-houses, were squads of bluecoats. An officer stepped forward and held a few words of whispered conversation with the chief.

Cairns did not catch all that was said, but he could hear that Edgewood was giving very definite instructions. It did not take long for him to give them, but Cairns knew that every precaution was being taken to insure the success of the raid which was planned.

Three men were detached from one of the groups of policemen at a sign from the officer, and they followed Cairns and Edgewood down the street. It was now close on to four o'clock in the morning, but there was no hint of dawn in the overcast sky, and the chill winds of the early morning swept up and down the street relentlessly.

Cairns had never felt better. The exciting experiences of the last few hours had served now to fortify him for the ordeal which lay ahead, and he was eager to be at the final

grapple, when they could come face to face with the enemy.

Presently they came in view of Firelight Lodgings. It was a three-story brick building, painted white. Swinging and creaking high over its narrow, low-stepped entrance was a sign on which "Welcome" was painted, and beneath the word, "Firelight Lodgings" in a woeful attempt at artistic lettering. Here it was that Muffin received the driftwood of the world and made of it kindling-wood of his own lighting.

"It's a great idea," said Cairns. "The most wretched criminals could go in and out of a place like this and not incur suspicion."

The reticent inspector made no reply. His jaw was set determinedly and he was evidently in no mood for talking. His mind was on the stiff business which confronted him, for he realized that with all the resources of men and iron at his command, the capture of the men inside this place might prove no easy task.

The moment for action was at hand. Inspector Edgewood walked up to the door and gently tried its handle. Then he drew back a pace and hurled all his giant frame against it. Again and again he pitted his strength against the door. It looked frail, but it would not yield.

Cursing softly beneath his breath, he tried once more and failed. Meanwhile two policemen were beating against the closed shutters and trying to pry them open with equally futile results. Cairns was watching the windows above, which had no shutters. His pistol was drawn and leveled, but no light or sound came from there.

Evidently the Sharks had fortified their headquarters; but they did not seem anxious to resist. The Firelight Lodgings was as still as a graveyard.

A policeman came running down an alley, which opened on the street two houses distant.

"Mr. Inspector," he cried, panting, "the windows and doors at the back of the house are solid as marble. We can't break in no way."

"Thunderation!" roared Edgewood. "We can't fool like this. We've got to get in."

Then he bent forward and examined the door more closely. A smothered exclamation came from his lips and he turned an angry face to his men.

"This door is made of solid iron," he said. "They've painted it to make it look like wood. We could hurl ourselves against this thing all night and it wouldn't give in. And I don't carry a battering-ram in my pocket."

Cairns' eyes had never left the upper part of the building. Now, without relaxing his vigil, he called out to the inspector:

"I can get in that place, and I should like to be the first man in. There's windows up there that haven't any shutters. I'm the only man here slight enough and agile enough to climb up there. Send for axes and dynamite, if you want to, but while you're doing that I'm going up there."

The inspector shook his head vigorously, and was about to interpose some objection; but Cairns refused to listen to him.

"There's some one in there I'm going to save, Edgewood," he barked. "You know that. Nobody else here can climb up to those windows. So here goes."

Before Edgewood could object, a scream startled them all. It was a woman's scream, breaking on the night with the shrill piteousness that rocked the heart of every man there. It came from within the Firelight Lodgings, and Cairns knew the voice.

He waited for no more. He leaped upon the window-ledge, and, clawing with half-frozen fingers, clutched the creaking sign and drew himself upward. All his old athletic power and skill came to him now. He trembled uncertainly on the crazy old signboard and caught some electric wiring for support. Above him, barely in reach of his hand, was the second-story window-ledge, and he grabbed it. Now slowly, painfully, but with a heart exulting in his own strength, he drew his weight upward, with both hands on the sill of the second-story window; and then, with a superhuman effort, he supported himself thus on one hand, while the other he lifted free.

With his free hand he touched the window. It was locked. The watchers below strained their eyes to see what would happen. They feared a murderous hand might suddenly dash through the window-glass and fell him.

But Cairns was not defeated by a locked window. Still supporting himself in this perilous position by one hand, he dashed his left fist, which was free, against the window-glass. The broken fragments tinkled and rattled as it fell on the floor inside.

The group outside the door were very fearful now for what might follow; but still no member of the gang appeared to thwart the daring purpose of the young physician. They saw him sink backward and rest for a second, saw him draw himself up again, and, reaching inside, feel for the catch by which the window was locked.

He found it. He shot back the tiny bolt, and then slowly, with exhausted breathing they all could hear, he pushed up the window. Then he drew himself up and over the window-sill into the room.

Cairns was in the nest of the Seven Sharks at last.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

WHAT HAPPENED TO CAIRNS

CAIRNS found himself in a dark room, apparently unfurnished. In the dimness he could barely make out several barrels standing in one corner, and there was a bulky box close to where he had landed. No one else was in the room.

Daring as were his intentions, Cairns did not lose sight of caution. He knew he might be walking into an ambush, but he could not see what object the gang might have in waiting to attack him later. He was fair game now. He drew out the revolver which Edgewood had given him.

Clutching this tightly, he moved softly to the door. It opened into a larger room, fitted with two rows of neat white cots, where the tramps who found shelter in the lodging-house went to sleep. He was not surprised to find every bed unoccupied. Muffin had seen to it that no derelicts were entertained on this important occasion. There was a skylight in the roof, which had evidently been broken recently, for there were bits of glass lying about. Rays from an arc light filtered in through this opening, casting a mean light through the place. There was no one beside himself on this floor; of that Cairns soon made certain.

Presently he located the stairs. They were at the farther end of the dormitory, and as Cairns tiptoed to them he saw they were a narrow, winding flight, and that but one man could pass up or down them at a time. This gave him more confidence. He bent over the banister and listened.

Not a sound came from below. The entire place was as quiet as a tomb. Except for that one wild scream, which Cairns had recognized as the voice of Mildred, there had come no sound from this sinister, silent place, where the Sharks and their prey should be cloistered.

A light was below him, and Cairns realized that if he stole down upon the gang his chances of being overpowered at once were good, unless he should be able to take them completely unawares. This he regarded as unlikely.

So he threw discretion to the winds. Holding his automatic before him, he rushed down the stairs, ready for battle.

But still no struggle awaited him. The room into which he rushed was the front office of the Firelight Lodgings. A gasjet illuminated the entire place, showed him the railing, the plain desk, the few rough chairs and the ugly pictures on the wall. But there was not a soul in the room, nor was there any sound.

A new fear possessed Cairns—the fear that the gang had gotten away. No resistance had been offered him; no one had attacked him; he had not seen or heard any one. How Munks and his men could have gotten away was beyond him, unless they had gone through the skylight; but in that case, how could they have taken Mildred, for an escape by that skylight was a risky business?

Cairns turned and looked around him. Behind him there was a door, and it was closed. Without hesitation he strode toward it and hurled it backward. Then he stepped to the threshold and looked in.

An extraordinary, unbelievable, impossible scene confronted him. Munks was there. Muffin and Arrington Parr and a little withered hunchback, Rigoletto, were beside him; and Mildred Carson was there. But not as Cairns, with his leveled automatic, had expected to find them.

They were lashed to chairs, arranged in a fantastic semicircle. Munks and his men and Mildred were bound with ropes, and gags had been thrust down their throats. Only Mildred had succeeded in freeing her mouth of the gag. She had been placed at one end of the semicircle.

Dumfounded and speechless, Cairns looked upon them. He saw the fierce helplessness written on the ascetic face of Munks, the brooding savagery traced on the sanctimonious countenance of Muffin, the mean rage and hate distorting the features of Rigoletto, and the blank dismay of Arrington Parr.

He saw that the shirts of the five conspirators had been torn open so that the crest of the Seven Sharks was laid bare. Scarred and marked on the breasts of the five, the signs were given a grim appearance by the phantom and weird glance of the gaslight.

He saw Mildred Carson turn quickly, as the door fell back, and watched the sudden rush of joy over the face of the girl he loved. Then he saw her grow very pale, her head fall backward and her eyes close. Brave little Mildred, now that her danger was over, had swooned away.

They were lashed to chairs, arranged in a fantastic semicircle.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

MILDRED CARSON'S STORY

AGAIN Cairns had reason to bless the emergency case which Mildred Carson had given him on Christmas morning. With the aid of the restoratives still remaining he brought her back to consciousness very quickly, meanwhile whispering tender, soothing words. In this emergency the instincts of his profession made him forget all about his official friends outside, and his own curiosity to know what had transpired.

He warned her not to talk. He unloosed her bonds only with great difficulty, for they had been tied with sailor cunning, and it was only by the aid of a pocket-knife that all the cords were finally taken from her arms and ankles, and the pale young nurse could stand again.

She put her hands on the shoulders of Cairns and looked up at him in speechless gratitude, and her glance spoke things which Cairns dared not try to interpret then. Meanwhile the Sharks, unable to shift an inch in their chairs, glared on at them savagely.

"You saved me," breathed Mildred earnestly. "What would have happened to me, God only knows. But you came, as I knew you would. How can I ever repay you?"

"I'll tell you how, soon," said Cairns gently; and then, with his old merry laugh, he added: "But there are some friends of mine outside who are very anxious to get in. Let's go and open the door.

Their hands clasped, Cairns and Mildred left the unhappy thieves in their minstrel first part half-circle, and went to the front door. They found it fastened with great iron bolts, which would not have yielded had all the police with Edgewood's party massed their collective strength against it. Cairns threw back the bolts and quickly drew back the door.

With leveled pistols Edgewood and his men rushed in upon them, and they started back rather foolishly at sight of the smiling pair before them.

"What does this mean?" demanded the inspector.

"It means the gang's inside, all bound around with a woolen string," replied Cairns, no longer responsible, so happy was he to have Mildred at his side. "But," he added quickly, "from what I have seen I am afraid we are only facing a deeper problem now."

Edgewood led the way to the rear room, and he stood in utter amazement at the strange sight which awaited him there. Then his sense of humor overmastering his official brusqueness, he shook with laughter at sight of the lowering Munks and his companions.

"Who can explain this?" he asked, when he had recovered himself again.

"I can tell you a little," volunteered Mildred readily.

"Tell us all you can," urged Edgewood, placing a chair before her. "I know you have gone through a terrible ordeal, but if you can just be spunky enough to hold out and tell me all you can, you may be a very valuable aid to us in closing up this case."

Mildred was quite ready to help. She told her story very simply and very clearly.

"I was attending a patient who had just had a sinking spell," she began. "All at once the lights went out. Then two persons grabbed me. One was a man, and the other was a girl. Before I could let out a scream, they had placed an ether basket over my face, and I became unconscious. That is why I feel so ill now; it is the effect of the ether. When I came to my senses I was in an automobile that was going very fast. A girl, who had come into the hospital this afternoon, and who, I have heard here, was Munks' wife, and that man there, whom they call Muffin, were beside me."

Muffin's eyes rolled threateningly, and Munks was scowling terribly as Mildred proceeded with her story.

"They brought me here and stood me before this man Munks, who came to see old Mother Judy in the hospital yesterday afternoon. I had heard them talking, and I understand the poor old lady was murdered at the same time I was kidnaped. Poor old lady, she feared them so! Munks told them to unbind me, and he spoke very politely. He told me he knew I had a paper, which an old woman in the hospital had given me, and he wanted me to give him that paper on the instant.

"I told him that he had kidnaped me; that he was a criminal and that my friends would see he suffered for it; and I refused to give him the paper. He only laughed sarcastically and called the girl who had helped attack me. He ordered her to take me into another room, remove all my clothing and search for the paper. He pointed to a large horsewhip and told me I would be beaten with it if I made any outcry or opposition. So I let the girl search me.

"But she did not find the paper. Munks and the others were very angry at this, and went off to themselves, whispering in the corner. Then they left this little hunchback to guard me, while they went up-stairs. This miserable creature tormented me with all manner of base insults; I slapped his face once, even though he threatened me with a revolver. He swore at me, and said his time would come.

"From what snatches of their conversation that I caught, I understood they were waiting for some one before proceeding with me. A man they called Ace came in, and I heard Munks tell him how he must meet a man at the railroad station. Then Munks turned to me and said:

" 'You have only a few hours left to live, young lady. I wish to make no secret of the fact that we are going to kill you by a particularly painful means, if you do not produce that paper when you are asked for it again. Make your peace with heaven and earth now, for your time is short. I always make it a point to warn those whom I fancy have religious convictions.' "

When Mildred described what Munks had done in these words, Cairns could have sprung at his throat. But Edgewood kept a steady grip on the young physician's arm.

"Something went wrong with their plans, however," continued Mildred. "A few hours ago a taxicab drove up to the door. Some one rapped on the door in a manner like a signal, and there were a series of raps passed from the inside and the outside. Then Munks opened the door.

"I was in this room. I heard Munks cry out in a terrible voice, as if filled with an awful dread of something. There was only a brief sound of struggle, and then a thud, as of a falling body.

"Then a big man, whom I had never seen before, rushed in among us. The sight of him brought consternation to these men. The hunchback began to whine and pray, groveling in a corner. Muffin threw up his arms and fell on his knees, and he was pale as death.

"The huge stranger waited for nothing. He sprang at Muffin and, drawing some ropes from his pocket, bound him to the chair. Then he caught Rigoletto, who kissed his hand, and tied him up also. Then he went out of the room.

"He came back presently with Munks, whom he had knocked unconscious, and whom he also bound to a chair. Lastly he left the house and returned after a few moments with this man"—indicating Parr—"before him. His hands were already tied, and he was soon bound to a chair just like the others.

"Now the big man came over to me. 'I guess you're Muffin's woman,' he said ungraciously. 'I heard about you. Gimme your hands.' And he bound me. When he had tied me tightly, he bent down and asked me, 'Where's old Judy?'

" 'Judy's dead,' I told him. 'They said they killed her in the Emergency Hospital this afternoon.'

"I never saw such a horrible shock to any man in my life. His face grew almost green and I thought he would faint. His big hands clenched into fists and unclasped again like a big, helpless baby.

"He turned around to the five of them and hurled terrible curses at them. Then he rushed about and found rags and gagged us all, cursing and groaning like all the time at what he called his bad luck.

" 'Stay here and starve, the lot of you,' he snarled, as he was about to leave. 'You tried to trick me in this deal, did you? You thought you'd leave me out, eh? Well, I'm one as won't be tricked, I won't. I won't be left out, I won't. Stay here and starve, the outfit of you. I won't come back. I know where the jewels is, and that's more'n what you know. Good-night, and a miserable death to you.'

"He went to the front door and adjusted all the bolts carefully. Then he rushed up-stairs and I heard a breaking of glass."

"He went through the skylight and got away that way," interrupted Cairns.

"I gave up hope of ever getting away, until I heard some one beating at the door. Then I struggled frantically to get those horrid bandages out of my mouth, and when I did I screamed. And then"—she finished with a liquid glance at Cairns—"and then you came!"

Inspector Edgewood was not interested in heroes just then. "It's plain as day," he said, "that when we thought our chase was over it's only just begun. The big criminal, whoever he is, has gotten away, and has probably gotten the jewels by this time. Still, we've bagged this bunch, and that's a good night's work. Meanwhile, Miss Carson, you must have hid that paper old Judy gave you very carefully. Where is it now?"

Mildred looked a little bewildered. "The paper?" she repeated. "Why, that's the first time I've really thought about that. I don't know what I did with it!"

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

ONE WHO CAN SETTLE IT

THE chief business of Inspector Edgewood was solving mysteries, and there was nothing more he detested on earth than a mystery that kept him guessing any length of time. Before Mildred Carson had finished his story, he had been there fuming and fussing and fretting under the realization of two things:

One, that the arch criminal had eluded his reach and that he had left no tangible clue, and that there was precious little to hops for from questioning the five prisoners, as they were probably as ignorant as the police about the stranger.

Two, that as long as all the conspirators were not caught, and it was known that Mildred Carson had the secret of Mother Judy in her possession, her life was in constant danger.

Therefore this fresh irritation—Mildred forgetting what she had done with the precious little scrap of paper—was the straw that broke the back of his camel of patience.

"I don't care a hang about the darn thing, anyway," he rasped. "Begging your pardon, Miss Carson, but I don't. This covey of birds here ought to give me some information, anyhow. You and Cairns had better go on home. You will hear from us later in the day; but you need some sleep now. We'll take care of this bunch."

He threw a glance of triumphant glee over the men who had been made prisoners for him, and they looked back at him savagely.

Mildred smiled back gratefully at the red-faced inspector and stood closer to Cairns. The latter seemed about to speak an objection, and then suddenly changing his mind he bent over and whispered something to Mildred. She nodded her head in ready agreement and with warm courage. The eyes of Rigoletto were on them all the while, and though Cairns did not know, Rigoletto had heard.

"We will go home in a little while," answered Cairns to the inspector; "but we would like to hear what the Sharks will have to say for themselves when you release them."

Edgewood grinned and nodded to his men. At once they

set to work to release the conspirators. They had no fear of resistance, for there were five or six policemen in the party for each one of the Sharks.

Munks was the first to be free and the first to stand. He drew himself up to his full height and took a deep breath. Then, in rather a mechanical fashion, he shook himself, his eyes meanwhile fixed on the ceiling. His old air of nonchalance and easy suavity returned to him almost instantly, settling upon him like a mantle over his shoulders. With a slight, whimsical smile he glanced about him, finally settling his gaze on Mildred.

"I have the very great honor, young lady," he said musically, "of offering you my sincere congratulations. You have won my deepest admiration and respect. You faced some sore trials without faltering. It shall not be said of Munks that he did not appreciate those qualities in others which in himself he valued most highly. And your cleverness! I wonder where you did hide that paper? So clever you deceived yourself, eh? Well, well, well!"

These last three exclamations were called forth by something else beside the astuteness of the young lady whom so recently Munks had threatened with death. An unimaginative, impolite policeman had put a pair of steel bracelets on the thin, strong wrists of Munks, and now he was a prisoner of law and order.

He smiled down at them a little grimly. "Toys!" he exclaimed. "Toys! But you are wasting precious time. Why handcuff me, or my friends here, who would not resist you for the world? Why not be sensible? We have done nothing. I warn you now that for all the evidence you think you have against us, you cannot convict us in a court of law. We have laid our plans so well that I am not even afraid to tell you that. Why not strike out for the big prize? Why not go after the man who has escaped? We are the ones who can help you find him. We have a clue; you haven't, and as long as we have done no wrong——"

Edgewood laughed impatiently. "Is it not a crime then to kidnap Miss Carson?" he demanded.

Munks held up his manacled hands in protest. "We did not kidnap her," he declared. "Let the case come to trial, and you shall see. Meanwhile, your man is getting away with the goods. Why can't we all be allies?"

Edgewood clapped his hands together angrily. "Link hands with swindlers, thieves, murderers!" he cried. "I'll link every last one of you to the scaffold. Ryan, put these men in the wagon and send them to headquarters. I want to look around here a while and then I'll be down to talk to them."

Cairns looked at his watch. It was nearly half-past four in the morning, but there was no sign at present of approaching light. The situation struck the doctor as symbolic.

"No light yet in the heavens, nor in this tangled business," he said to Mildred. "I am a little worried. We must not let this other man go free; if he does not find those jewels, he will try to get that paper from you. I think we had better do what I suggested."

"I could never rest until all is finished," said Mildred.

"Then we must see that it is settled quickly," decided Cairns. "We will let him settle it."

As they left, Arrington Parr, the last of the conspirators, was being released from his bonds. Into the blackness of the early morning they went forth, with a quick farewell to Edgewood. After a little while they found a taxicab, and just before the dawn they set out for Gray Gables on the hill.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

EXACTLY WHAT LOSARN EXPECTED

LOSARN had not gone to bed. In his library they found him, still beneath the glow of the swinging orange lamp, with the watchful Rakko standing near by. He smiled a little humorously at sight of the girl and the man on his threshold.

"It has been an exciting evening, hasn't it?" was his greeting to them, "and you have so far succeeded that you rescued the young lady from the teeth of the Sharks; but the big Shark got away."

Cairns looked at him in new amazement. "How in the devil do you find these things out?" he asked.

"Never mind. We must not waste time in idle talk now, for time is very valuable. Edgewood should have the gang at headquarters by now. Now, relate to me exactly what has happened to you, Cairns, since you left here, and what you have learned from Miss Mildred. Take those chairs there."

Cairns told their story quickly. When he was finished, Losarn asked Mildred to come closer.

"Look at that picture!" he commanded, holding a photograph above his head, so that the light shone full upon it. It was the picture Cairns had seen early in the night—the picture with the haunting eyes.

"Oh!" cried Mildred quickly. "That's the man!"

"What man?" cried Cairns.

"The man who tied up Munks and the rest of them and got away through the skylight. The most ferocious, bloodthirsty man I ever saw."

Losarn was smiling with a bright, enigmatical complacency. "Be seated, Miss Carson," he begged. "You have confirmed a little theory of mine admirably. I was certain I was getting on the right track of this strange problem, and you have settled all my doubts. There remains only to be found a way to get him, and to get him before he gets us."

"Gets us!" echoed Mildred and Cairns in chorus.

"Yes; we are all marked for death at his hands, if we do not act quickly. You must understand the situation. So let us be quick. Let me think."

Losarn was drifting in thought from them; he had passed again into the silence where his mind grappled with those enigmas, which only his genius and unerring, penetrating intellect could solve. He was silent for perhaps five minutes, then he languorously opened his eyes.

"Cairns, my good fellow, what is that little bit of white projecting above the edge of your right upper vest-pocket?" he asked with a bantering note in his voice.

The physician glanced down quickly and drew out a folded paper. Mildred gave a little cry.

"Why, that's the paper Mother Judy gave me," she said. "Oh, doctor, I gave it to you just after she had given it to me. Don't you remember?"

Losarn clapped his hands dramatically. "Don't look at it, please," he begged. "It may seem like a foolish fancy, but I must insist. Please let me look at the paper first."

Without a word, Cairns passed it over. With slow eagerness Losarn opened it and held it up, so that the rays of light fell full upon it.

"Are you sure this is the paper?" he asked with a note of disappointment in his voice.

"Certain!" answered Cairns. "Though how on earth you knew I had it in my pocket, when I had forgotten it myself, is beyond me."

Losarn passed it back to them without comment. It was a circular advertisement of a manufacturer of surgical instruments, supplies, false arms and others things which doctors need.

In blank amazement the three looked at each other. Then over the pale face of Losarn stole the dawn of understanding.

"It is not a joke!" he cried. "This paper is really a clue. It's not easy to read, but it will lead us to the Jacobi ten-million-dollar jewel collection as sure as you are alive. Cairns, take that phone there and do as I say. Call the Emergency Hospital. Tell them who you are. Ask them if anything important has occurred during your absence. Quick, now!"

A few moments later Cairns was talking to the head nurse. "Is everything all right in the wards?" he asked.

The phone was at Losarn's left hand. The professor and the girl could watch his face, and they saw the sudden, blanching surprise which swept over it.

"Wait!" he cried, and turned to Mildred and Losarn.

"The body of Mother Judy has been stolen!" he exploded. "Some one has stolen it from the hospital morgue! Hello!"

He grabbed the telephone again and urged the nurse to give him more details. "Yes! Go on! Don't get excited now," he rattled on. "When did this happen? Ten minutes ago. Good-night! How did it happen?"

He listened attentively for a little while, then said good-by, and hung up the receiver.

"The big man has reappeared again," said Cairns. "He walked into the hospital morgue, where the old keeper was half asleep, and rapped him on the head, knocking him out. Then he doubled the body up, put it in a bag, and got away. The keeper was coming to just as the robber was leaving the morgue with the bag over his shoulder. What in heaven's name are we fighting, Professor Losarn—human beings or fiends?"

"Both," answered Losarn; "but I am not surprised at the robbery. It is exactly what I expected. Rakko!"

The black man stepped forward instantly.

"Remove me from this room," commanded Losarn.

To the complete puzzlement of Mildred and Cairns, the professor was wheeled from the room without another word. The curtains closed behind master and man, and they were alone.

Through the window draperies came then the first gray finger of the dawn.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

OVER THE MONASTERY WALL

PRESENTLY Rakko returned. He glanced solemnly at the two visitors, and placed a thick, black finger to his lips. Then he, too, passed out of another door, returning a few seconds later with large bundles piled in his arms. He went on into the room where Losarn had been taken.

Cairns and Mildred, deeply puzzled, conversed in low tones. The physician assured his companion that, however peculiar appeared the actions of Losarn, they might feel assured that he was acting toward a good purpose.

"He is about to spring a surprise," opined Cairns.

As they were talking, Rakko reappeared. "Master implores you to return to the automobile at once," he said. "He says it will be wiser to do so now, without delay."

The doctor and the girl glanced at each other quickly. Did Losarn anticipate an attack on his own house? Was he afraid the place was to be burned over his head, or blown up, that he counseled such an immediate exit? They followed the salaaming Rakko through the corridor and to the door. In the pink-gray of the dawning morning they clambered down the hillside to the spot where they had left their automobile.

A genuine surprise was waiting there for them. Muffled in great furs, Losarn was sitting, smiling and serene, in the car. He was beckoning them to hurry.

As they took their places next to him, he told them how Rakko had bundled him and then carried him down the hillside. He confided to them that he believed they were on their way now to the final solution of the mystery, and that he was enthusiastic enough about the matter to be anxious to be there when the curtain rose on the last act.

"I can safely forecast that it's likely to be an exciting scene," he promised.

Through the mists of the beginning day, against which a sluggish sun struggled feebly to be seen, the limousine of Losarn glided, gaining new speed as it left the steep hill roads and came to long, level stretches. Losarn sat straight and silent, discouraging all attempts at conversation. Unfamiliar as he was with the territory, Cairns could not guess where they were going. The entire surroundings were new, both to Cairns and Mildred.

After a mile or so Losarn touched Cairns' arm and pointed to a high hill five or six miles away. The gray buildings on its summit evidently were those of a religious institution; its rough stones and croses betokened a convent or a monastery.

"Is that where we are bound for?" asked Cairns.

Losarn nodded his head affirmatively, and then drew in a glad, deep breath of the freshening morning breezes. Cairns settled back, too, and gathered the early air into his lungs. He looked down at Mildred, whose cheeks were reddening under the glow of the warming sun and the sharp, keen air.

It was all so peaceful and so natural. The horrors of the night before faded off into the phantoms with the mists which the sun chased away. Surely there could be no more horror and dreadful deeds in the good sunlight.

They had come now to the base of the hill and began the ascent of the long, encircling road, which winds and twists with dangerous curves around the side. Losarn's chauffeur drove with the utmost care. Once he stopped and glanced back at the professor. The latter signaled to him, and he rounded a dangerous bend expertly. Losarn was growing more excited; Cairns could tell that by the dancing of his wonderful eyes.

He leaned over to Cairns and whispered:

"Have you a weapon with you?"

Cairns drew out the automatic which he had carried into the Firelight Lodgings, and which had not yet been discharged.

"Have you anything else?" asked Losarn.

Cairns shook his head.

From under his seat Losarn drew another revolver and held it on his knees. He pressed a buzzer—a signal to the chauffeur—and the car came to a quick stop. Losarn glanced out of the machine warily, up and down. Satisfied that no one was observing or following them, the professor turned to Mildred.

"Your insistence on accompanying us on this hazardous little enterprise, Miss Mildred, is admirable," he said slowly. "But you must take all precautious to protect yourself. I want you to understand that there is a possibility of an attack. You had better take this."

Mildred held out a steady hand for the revolver. The bright sun made it glisten as she held it away from her, aiming at a tree far below.

"I could shoot this," she said with game confidence. "I will shoot it, too, if I have to. Don't you worry about me. Let's go."

The two men smiled at each other. The girl's courage and daring was something which made them both feel proud to be in her company.

Losarn pressed the buzzer again, and they drove on, coming at last to the gate of the monastery. It was closed with huge, wide gates of medieval design. There was a little window barred with iron, through which the keeper could look without exposing himself.

Without new instructions from Losarn, the chauffeur drove the car very close to the wall, perhaps a hundred feet away from the gate. The car glided so softly under the watchful care of the chauffeur that it made very little sound.

"Now," whispered Losarn, "I want you, Cairns, to climb on top of this car. From that position you can look over the edge of the wall. Just raise your head and get a quick glance. Then come down and let me know what you see."

The young doctor scrambled to the edge of the car, and presently was safely on its top. They could hear him settle himself, bracing himself against the wall. Then there was silence for a moment.

Presently Cairns, white faced and startled, was with them again. "He's in there, digging a grave for Mother Judy!" he cried.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

STRANGE BUSINESS

"WE are practically single-handed," said Losarn, when Cairns had described all that he had seen.

"You, Cairns, are that single hand. I cannot help you in the fight, unless they come at me, for I cannot move. Mildred will only defend herself. You must be the aggressor. Climb back there; get a good look at what he is doing, and whether he has any one near to help

him. Then fire! You must take him unawares, or he will outwit you. Fire at his legs; cripple him, and he will be ours!"

Cairns climbed back to his post with a last fond glance at Mildred. The machine had been brought so close to the wall that by standing on tiptoe it was quite easy for him to look down on the interior of the monastery yard. This he proceeded now to do.

What he saw was a wide yard, with many trees and well-laid-out lawns and pebbled walks and gardens. This was a grove at the rear of the estate, and it was deserted now, except for one living man.

He was the man whose picture Cairns had seen in Losarn's library—the man with the haunting eyes, the man whom Mildred had identified by his portrait as the one who had overpowered the Seven Sharks, or what remained of them, in the Firelight Lodgings.

He was working with a spade. Though it was cold, he had thrown aside his cap and coat, and his shaggy, gray locks were the playthings of the wind. His broad shoulders swelled and sank rhythmically as he toiled with his spade, digging deeper and deeper.

The man was undoubtedly digging a grave, and the object of his preparations was easy to see. Laid out with a fantastic sort of care, and with a rude attempt at dignity, was the body of Mother Judy.

As the laboring brigand drove his spade fiercely into the soil, Cairns caught wisps of a tune he was singing in a deep-throated monotone. Instantly he recognized it. It was the tune old Judy had sung in her ravings in the hospital:

"Of skulls and bones we'll make our feast,
Tra-la! La-la-la! La-la!
With blood for water and brains for yeast,
Tra-la! La-la-la! La-ah-la!"

For one wild moment Cairns had a suspicion of the real truth; but the impossibility of the idea drove it quickly from his mind. He watched the big old bandit, whose back was turned to him all the while, delaying the shot he had climbed up there to fire in his interest in watching.

The old fellow was still singing softly to himself.

Now the digger turned his face to the eastern wall of the cloister, and Cairns caught a glimpse of his face in profile. Its bold and rugged outline had all the spirit of an ancient pirate. Of what interest was Mother Judy to this man? Why had he stolen her body? Why was he here? How had Losarn known he was here?

Another object lying on the ground now caught the attention of Cairns. It was a long, round bundle, wrapped in a newspaper. It had been placed under a tree, not two feet from the grave-hole, and Cairns observed that the digger kept a very close watch upon it.

The hole was getting deep now; to one side of the grave there was a great pile of the fresh, brown earth, and it would soon be deep enough to receive the grim object for which it apparently was being dug. Only the shoulders and head of the digger projected above the edge. Cairns decided he must wait to shoot, for he shrank at wounding him mortally. Besides, Cairns hated to take an unfair advantage, even of the most desperate enemy. He believed in fair play, whether on the athletic field, or in such serious business as was now before him. He liked an open fight and a fair one.

But he was suddenly given an extraordinary opportunity to fire on the digger.

He climbed up out of the grave and turned his attention to the body of Mother Judy. With a rough sort of reverence, which did not fail to surprise and impress Cairns, he knelt beside the body, and, after crossing himself, he closed his eyes and muttered words which Cairns did not hear.

Next he drew from under a tree a white parcel, which he unfolded and spread wide on the ground. It was a white sheet. On this he placed the body, with the ease of a man of prodigious strength. Then he began winding the sheet around the body in long, twisting folds.

Cairns watched the gruesome business in a sort of fascinated daze. He followed each move almost mechanically; but out of this reverie he was suddenly summoned by some one tugging at his foot.

It was Mildred, looking up at him with a face white with anxiety. She was so excited she could not speak, but she pointed with one hand, urging him to look down the road.

Cairns looked. Down by the gate he saw a party of men placing ladders against the wall. Up those ladders they were soon clambering hurriedly. In each man's hand there was a revolver. Cairns recognized them—every last one.

There was Munks and Muffin and Rigoletto and Arrington Parr, and they were rushing down on the digger at the grave to take him unawares.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE MAN IN THE GRAVE

WHY he did it, Cairns never knew. But when in utter bewilderment he saw the four dangerous prisoners of Inspector Edgewood free and more dangerous than ever before; when he saw them racing to attack the man who had dug the grave, he forgot to wonder how they had escaped; he forgot to wonder how they had known where to find this man; he forgot everything that puzzled him in his desire to warn the big brigand of his peril.

He found a stone on top of the wall and threw it to warn the grave-digger. It struck on the edge of the spade with a rattle, and accomplished its purpose.

The brigand turned with the agility of a leopard, and the next instant had seen the invading Sharks. Like the audacious fighter that he was, he acted boldly, fearlessly, quickly.

With one long arm he reached for the bundle under the tree. He swept this into the grave. Then he swung the body of the old woman around until it lay across the upper end of the grave like a rampart. Then he dropped into the grave.

He whipped out a revolver from his pocket, and, bending low behind the body, he took aim.

Munks, rushing at him in the foremost of the Sharks, was his target. Munks was the leader, the brains of this crowd. If Munks were eliminated, the man in the grave might have a chance.

So the man's weapon was trained on the white-haired, wolf-eyed Munks, who was racing fearlessly over the frozen lawns. Munks, too, had a leveled revolver, but his hand had no time to tighten on the trigger.

The revolver from the grave cracked on the holy quiet of the morning, and the sound of it echoed over the tree-tops and far down the hillsides to the valley. Munks, with both hands thrown up over his head, as if in sudden invocation, fell face forward to the ground.

Rigoletto stopped in his mad rush, shaking with terror at what he had seen. Muffin stopped, too, and got behind a tree. Arrington Parr and Rigoletto followed his example.

Looking down into the grave, Cairns saw the gaunt stranger laughing to himself—laughingly grimly, hoarsely, in piratical glee. But if either the man in the grave or Cairns had supposed that the invaders would quit because Munks had been shot, they were speedily to be undeceived.

Muffin and Parr and Rigoletto were only planning a new means of attack. They were in the position of an attacking force, facing an enemy who was entrenched behind strong defenses; and, with the astuteness for which every member of the gang was known, they quickly decided on a new plan of campaign.

The hunchback was the principal in the new offensive. Unknown to the man in the grave, he began climbing a tree. The curious, misshapen body was winding its long arms and legs around the trunk and working its way upward like a monkey. Cairns could see him clearly. He could even see the terrible expression into which his fa[illegible]y

was distorted, because between his rows of huge, yellow teeth he was clutching his revolver.

Cairns dared not warn the man in the grave of this. To have done so would have been to have faced fire from both sides. Behind his interest in what was going on, Cairns had the knowledge that, whichever way this battle went, it would be his job to fight the victor.

With ape-like agility the hunchback squirmed his way higher and higher. A fork in the trunk was just over his head, and he wrapped his long arms around this and drew himself upward until he was squatting and panting in the branches like an ugly frog. From this position he could see into the grave, but he must climb higher to get a fair shot.

The man in the grave, ignorant of the danger that was so near to him, ripped out a sonorous, musical defiance at his foes.

"Come on, you traitors!" he howled. "Come on, you hounds! Sing the old tune with me!"

And he launched into his terrible ditty of

"Of skulls and bones we'll make our feast,
Tra-la! La-la-la! La-la!"

Not satisfied with the position he had gained, Rigoletto began maneuvering to gain a most satisfactory one. Lying flat against one wide-flung arm of the tree, he wriggled out upon it, first replacing the revolver against his teeth. Cairns had never remembered seeing anything quite so monstrous as Rigoletto's face just then.

Behind their tree-trunks, Muffin and Parr watched their evil-favored associate worming across the branches. On him they were pinning their hopes now for the sudden defeat of their enemy.

Meanwhile the man in the grave was growing defiantly cautious. Still roaring his song, he knelt warily behind the body which formed his breastworks and lifted his head to reconnoiter.

Suddenly a wild yell rent the air. It was a scream of mortal terror, and it brought the eyes of Muffin and Parr, of Cairns and the man in the grave, all to the tree-top.

Rigoletto was dangling between sky and earth.

A slender branch, to which he had trusted his weight, had snapped beneath him. Still clinging with his long arms, he swung from the arm of the tree like a frightened monkey.

The man in the grave shook back his shaggy locks and roared with laughter.

CHAPTER TWENTY

"AND NOW—YOU!"

ONLY for a few moments could the hunchback maintain his hold. Then, with a last despairing yell, he dropped in a heap unhurt, except for the bruises and scratches, to the ground. Before he could make a dash for cover the man in the grave yelled:

"Stop! Stop, you traitor! Come here to me, or I'll kill you!"

Rigoletto had no choice but to obey. Cowering, abject, he went to the edge of the grave.

The man in the grave laughed boisterously and regarded his prisoner with the proud air of a conqueror.

"It's not the first time I've fought against big odds and won out," he shouted. "D'ye hear that, Muffin? D'ye get that, Parr? I've caught a prisoner—a little dickey bird of a prisoner. The game's almost up; better surrender now and see how my mercy tastes."

He shot a quick glance of contempt at Rigoletto, whom he kept covered with a revolver, while he watched warily across the lawns, where his two remaining enemies were in hiding. Receiving no answer to his jibes, he settled back and caught the hunchback by the ankles, dragging him awkwardly down into the grave.

Cairns was filled with admiration for the audacity of the plan which the huge bandit next proceeded to put into execution. From his pocket he drew out a ball of thick twine. He roughly seized the hunchback and placed him in front of him, so that he could guard him and watch his sheltered enemies at the same time.

Then he wound the twine around the wrists of Rigoletto, twisting them into such intricacies and knots that presently the captive could not move his hands. Bending lower, but keeping his eyes carefully on the open ground, he bound the feet of his prisoner with equal care. He was humming his pirate tune all the while.

These operations, of course, could not be observed by Parr or Muffin, because the man in the grave worked on Rigoletto close under the shelter of the body of Mother Judy, and consequently could not be seen. The two remaining conspirators were evidently not averse to a waiting game behind their tree-trunks. Neither of them had a reputation for bravery under fire, and they evidently considered their wisest course to await what turn events might take in the hope of ultimate victory.

To Mildred, who stood below him, Cairns had signaled absolute silence. The girl was so tense and eager to know what was going on behind the wall that her face, in the fleeting glances which Cairns had caught of it, was flushed feverishly and her eyes shone brightly.

The big bandit was not willing to wait for a turn of events. It was his method to turn events himself, so that they meant the best advantage to him. Having bound Rigoletto so that he was practically helpless, he threw him roughly against the side of the grave. Then he bent low, as if he were charging the hunchback with certain precautions and promising certain penalties if they were not observed. The hunchback was shaking his head very rapidly, as if promising everything the big fellow wished of him.

Then the big man placed a revolver in his own mouth and climbed out of the grave at the rear. He lay flat on the ground. Then, with long, swift movements, much as a crab propels itself on land, he squirmed across the open ground until he reached a hedge that ran alongside of that part of the garden. Behind this hedge he disappeared. He actually had reached his goal, without Arrington Parr or Muffin knowing that he had escaped from the grave.

Cairns had noticed especially one thing with an interest growing constantly more acute. It was the long, round object wrapped in a newspaper, over which the big bandit had exercised such diligent watchfulness. He carried this bundle with him in his desperate scramble to safety behind the hedge, although this made his feat doubly difficult. Cairns puzzled over that bundle and itched to tear aside its wrappings of newspaper and see what it contained.

Free from his trench, with the two Sharks believing him still sheltered behind the bulky remains of Mother Judy, the bandit lost no time in driving to the full advantage the opportunity which he had won. For all his detestation for those on both sides of the miniature conflict, Cairns was forced in his heart to admit a secret admiration for the dauntless daring and resourcefulness of this weather-beaten old warrior, who seemed equal to any emergency and who was always thinking thirty paces ahead of his foes.

He felt like applauding when he saw the big man, still hugging the bundle to his breast, go racing, with head bent low, behind the hedge and disappear finally behind a portico of the cloister.

Cairns might have fired on the man as he fled, but he realized the risk he ran from the two Sharks under cover, and besides he was convinced the big fellow would not consider the battle over until he had subdued his last two enemies. In this surmise, Cairns proved to be wholly correct.

Watching the corner of the monastery at the other end of the yard, which was just behind where Parr and Muffin were sheltered, Cairns presently saw the head of the bandit peer around and then draw back quickly. Then silently and swiftly the bandit rushed around the corner.

He made straight for Arrington Parr. Neither Parr nor

Muffin heard his approach. He was five feet from them when he gave them warning.

He let out a screech that was worse than a steam whistle and more terrifying than a Comanche warwhoop. It broke on the stillness of the morning with startling suddenness and it had all the effect the band had desired.

Parr turned quickly about, surprised and unprepared. Before he could make a move the bandit had leaped at his throat and had shaken him back and forth so energetically that presently his eyes were rolling. Then he drew back and struck the stockbroker on the jaw. It knocked him out instantly, and the bandit threw the limp body to the turf.

Instead of becoming excited, the big fellow was cool and self-possessed as ever man could be.

"Come on, Muffin," he shouted laughingly, "you haven't got a chance with that gun you're trying to level at me. You ain't the fighting kind. Put that gun down! Put it down, I say!"

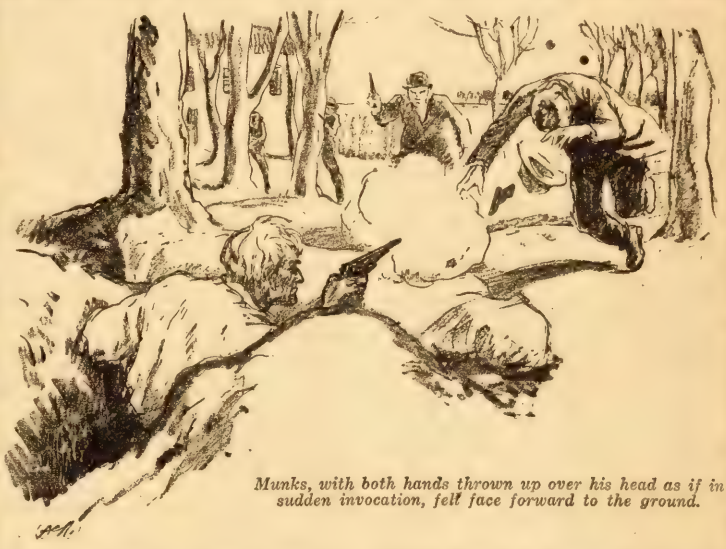
The intimidated Muffin accepted the advice. He threw the revolver to the ground at the bandit's feet, just as the limp body of the unconscious Parr dropped beside it.

"Go sit in the shade of that tree, where I can watch you and tie you up when I get time," he commanded. "I've got something else to think about just at present."

Dropping the bundle, which all the while he had held under his arm, he turned like lightning and leveled a revolver at Cairns.

"Come down from there, and be mighty quick about it!" he ordered sternly. "Now I'm ready for you!"

It was a time for quick thinking and quick action.



Munks, with both hands thrown up over his head as if in sudden invocation, fell face forward to the ground.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

UP TO HIS OLD TRICKS

CAIRNS' fine, unused automatic revolver lay within two inches of his hand; but in the abstraction of watching the ghastly game of hide and seek below him he had relaxed his grip and relaxed his vigilance. Now he was at the mercy of the man who held him covered with a weapon which he had already proved by the prostrate figure of Munks he knew how to shoot.

The one chance left to Cairns was to dodge quickly behind the wall. But the young doctor was not ready to take that chance. He was not ready to expose the invalid Losarn, who because of his broken legs could not move from his seat, and the frail, tired Mildred to danger from this merciless man.

If he were to drop behind the wall, the big man would be clambering over him in a second, and, if shooting followed, those in the automobile beneath his feet would be exposed to fire with scarcely a chance to defend themselves.

All these things darted like nightning through the mind of Cairns. He glanced below him and saw Mildred smile back encouragingly. She had not heard the bandit's words; she did not know the doctor was at that moment in the power of the man on the other side of the wall.

In less than two seconds after the bandit had covered Cairns, the latter's hands were held high in the air in token of surrender.

"Come down here to me, and be quick," ordered the stranger. "I don't like to be kept waiting, and this is my busy day. I want to know who you are and what you are doing, spying on me and my affairs over this wall. I've been gardener here for years, and this is the first time I ever caught anybody prying into my business."

Cairns dropped to the interior of the monastery yard. He no longer felt afraid, but he was wondering what Mildred and Losarn would think of his sudden jump over the wall. Would they summon help, and if they did, would it arrive in time? Cairns had no doubt this man would exterminate every life in his path, if he considered it necessary for his purposes.

Manfully the physician walked up to the powerful, hard-breathing man, who stood guard with his spade over the curious bundle lying at his feet. Cairns looked him in the eye squarely, and his calm, unintimidated disposition seemed to impress the man, who naturally admired this show of bravado.

"I merely climbed up on top of my machine outside to get a glimpse of this interesting old place," began Cairns, with a trace of irritation blended skilfully in his voice. He gave the impression that he considered himself the victim of an outrage. "When I looked over the wall I saw a fight between you and the rest of the crowd here. My curiosity was excited, and I remained to see what happened."

A sardonic smile tugged at the lips of the bandit.

"Indeed!" he said, with a forward shake of his head. "Indeed! You're a liar! Why did you hold an automatic revolver in your hand so long, eh?"

Cairns had not anticipated any such question as that. He racked his brain hurriedly for a reply and found one.

"I only drew that when I saw what was going on," he explained. "I was curious enough to want to see it all; but I made up my mind to fight for myself, if any one attacked me. I didn't want to shoot any one."

"I can readily believe that," answered the bandit, with a meaning laugh and holding out an earth-stained, brawny hand. "Shake!"

Cairns looked at him stupidly. The bandit still held out his hand.

"I'm going to tie you up just the same as the others," he said amiably. "A long ball of twine and a gun on your hip, and you can't lose. That's my motto. I've got enough cord left for the whole blooming batch, and I'll guarantee you won't follow me when I leave. But before I tie you up I want to shake your hand."

Cairns hesitated. "Why should I shake hands with you?" he objected.

"Because you saved my life. You threw a stone when I had my back turned to this bunch of traitors and I caught them just in time, or they'd have done for me. I had been watching you since the first time you peeped over that wall. You made enough noise getting up there, the Lords knows. I wanted to see what you were going to do with that new pistol of yours. Besides, I was right busy on a job we don't have to do every day. I'm grateful for that stone you threw, and that's why I want to shake your hand."

Cairns did shake hands with him, but not without a shudder. Then he said:

"I'm almost sorry I didn't fire at you now."

The bandit made a grimace and drew out more cord from the seemingly inexhaustible supply in his pockets.

"Hold out your hands!" he demanded of Cairns.

The latter did so, but his hands were shaking. They were shaking as fast as the leaves in the fall. They shook so that the big fellow sniggered as he wound the twine around them.

But it was not from fear that Cairns was trembling. He was striving desperately to control a new and overwhelming surprise. He was fighting back the color from his cheeks and the fire from his eyes, and he was feigning nervousness just to delude for a few minutes and hold in his present position the bandit stranger. He was beating back with all the strength of his soul the slightest indication that might betray him.

For Cairns was tremendously excited and surprised. He had seen over the shoulder of the outlaw what that man could not possibly see, and Cairns determined that by no outward token of joy or suspense should he be warned.

Losarn had not been idle.

His chauffeur had mounted the ladders by which the four Sharks had climbed over into the yard. He had scrambled down and began fumbling with the mighty bolts with which the gate was held. Engrossed over his knotting and twisting of twine, the outlaw had not heard nor seen.

A moment later, and one of the wide gates was flung backward. Then, as the bandit bent lower over the knotted cords around Cairns' wrists, the physician watched the limousine gliding smoothly into the yard. It turned and bore down upon them.

In Losarn's hand was a coiled rope. As the big bandit, catching the whir of the motor at last, wheeled quickly, Losarn's hand was lifted.

Over the lowered windshield the rope darted like a swift arrow, straight for the brigand. Losarn had not forgotten the cunning of his cowpuncher days; he roped the bandit and dragged him, helpless, toward the car.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

WHO IS THAT MAN?

THE captor of the Sharks was a prisoner himself at last. Where police, detectives and robbers, too, had fallen beneath the cunning and the brawn of this extraordinary criminal, a calm-eyed, physically disabled college professor had captured him; for Losarn had caught him in a grip not all his strength could break.

Cairns gave a shout of delight at sight of his deliverer, and waved to Mildred. The chauffeur came running up and began quickly to bind the prisoner so as to insure his safe-keeping.

"You put the cords on his wrists, Cairns," called out Losarn jovially. "Turn about is fair play, you know."

It was the most agreeable task the young physician had been given that evening. He could not help smiling into the face of the baffled old villain, who, now that he was overpowered, stood solemn and vindicative regarding Losarn.

"There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip," quoted Cairns merrily, as he did his best to make the wrist-knots secure. "Stand still, now."

And then the physician began humming the tune which he had first heard from Mother Judy in the Emergency Hospital and had later heard from this man only a few minutes before—the wild, grimly ferocious tune:

"Of skulls and bones I'll make my feast,
Tra-la! La-la-la! La-la!"

But even in that final hour of humiliation the man would not admit defeat nor surrender hope. At his feet still lay the bundle which he had guarded so carefully. Apparently in a fit of anger he kicked it, and it gave a dull thud in answer to the blow and rolled over to the edge of the grave.

"Miserable old clothes," he muttered. "I guess I'll never wear them again. Let 'em rot there."

"Old clothes," repeated Cairns, as he pulled the cords tighter. "That's didn't sound like old clothes."

"It's what it is; it's what it is," cried the man.

"They're not old clothes," Losarn called out earnestly. "You just bring that bundle to me."

The chauffeur secured it, and when it was brought to Losarn, he placed it at his feet beneath a lap-robe, and the professor heaved such a sigh as Mildred, who sat beside him, tried in vain to interpret. It is such a sigh as one gives when a great dream, a cherished ambition, is at last realized.

Cairns, his job completed, turned to Losarn, not quite certain what to do next. He darted significant glances at Muffin and Rigoletto, who remained stupid onlookers from the open grave, and to Arringon Parr, who was just beginning to stir back to consciousness on the lawn.

Losarn answered his unspoken question.

"If I mistake not," he said, "I hear an automobile. It should contain some people who are extremely anxious to meet our three friends here again."

Even as he spoke Inspector Edgewood, followed by five or six men in blue and brass, ran through the gate. Their delight at the scene before them was unrestrained, and Edgewood shook Losarn's hand in silent embarrassment and gratitude. Five minutes later all the thieves, including the big man of mystery, were in handcuffs, ready to be taken away.

"They won't escape this time," declared Edgewood, with a glance at the fallen figure of Munks. "They got him, I see. Well, it's a good thing for the community. If ever there was a devil and a smart one, it was Munks."

"How did they escape you?" asked Cairns.

"Munks," answered Edgewood shortly; "he was a genius. He knows as much about handcuffs as Houdini; he had those on him unlocked as soon as he wanted to. All the while Miss Carson here was telling us her story, they were thinking what they were going to do. They got out of those handcuffs, took us completely by surprise, and made a rush for the police wagon. Munks got at the wheel, and off they drove in the police patrol, going like crazy men. I followed as best I could in my car."

"How did they know this was the place and how did you?"

But here Losarn interrupted. He offered a brief word of apology, but he was insistent.

"Forgive me," he said; "but all these necessary explanations of wonders and near wonders can come after we have had breakfast, and I have talked with these men. We are all worn out just now and need breakfast. But there is still one very important thing about which you do not seem to be thinking."

"What is that?" they asked in chorus.

Losarn pointed a lean finger at the man he had lassoed and made prisoner.

"Who is he?" he asked.

"Some crook who tried to beat the Sharks at their own game," ventured Cairns.

"The devil himself," said Mildred with a shudder.

"The Lord knows!" cried Edgewood.

"Cairns!" cried Losarn, with his old imperious air. "Turn back his shirt, so that we can see his chest."

The physician did as he had been told. He unbottoned the brown woolen shirt the man wore, and exposed the great, brawny chest, to lay bare to the morning sunlight the familiar sign of a curling seven, around which was twisted a green shark, with uplifted fangs.

"Now," cried Losarn, "who is he?"

But they merely started, not yet comprehending.

"Think!" urged Losarn. "There were seven of them. Judy was murdered. Ace Wood was murdered. Munks was killed in fair fight. Here is Rigoletto and here is Arrington Parr and here is Muffin. Who is this man?"

Wonderingly, still unbelieving, they looked again. Edgewood stared hard at the captive, walking near to him with a gaze that bored into his soul.

"There were only seven?" he shot back at Losarn.

"Only seven!"

"Then the grave has given back its dead!" exclaimed Edgewood. "This is the king of the Seven Sharks! This is Punch!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

LOSARN TELLS HIS SECRET

LOSARN was a very wonderful, a powerfully able, but sometimes a thoroughly irritating man. It came on him like a mood, and when it had him in its grip he irritated and annoyed every one around him.

That was precisely the mood that came over him after Edgewood's dramatic identification of the rugged bandit. He smiled when the old prisoner shook his shaggy head and said:

"Losarn, he tried to get me more'n twenty-five years ago, and he got me at last. Well, do any of you think I care? Judy's dead; I should worry now, shouldn't I?"

Losarn absolutely refused to participate in or to countenance any further conversation. Explanations, he insisted, must wait. Breakfast had been delayed too long; necessary rest had been delayed far too long. And, besides, everything was not cleared up yet. He must talk further with Punch and these other prisoners before his mind was entirely satisfied.

Accordingly, against the protests of Mildred, Cairns and Inspector Edgewood, without any additional questioning, the party re-entered the three machines outside—Losarn's car, the auto patrol and Edgewood's runabout—and started back for the city. Before leaving, Losarn had outlined precisely what he wanted done.

By his orders the silent Punch was placed on the seat between Losarn and Cairns in the rear of the automobile. Two policemen also rode in the car by Edgewood's request. Mildred sat beside the chauffeur. In the police car Edgewood kept a personal watch over his brace of prisoners. So, with Losarn's car in the lead, they speeded on to detective headquarters.

But Losarn had further matters on which he was determined. He insisted on Mildred and Cairns leaving him, as they passed the Emergency Hospital. He drove them to the entrance of the institution and instructed them both to repair to their rooms and rest immediately after a light breakfast, and to be back at Gray Gables at three o'clock in the afternoon.

Then, with a merry wave of his hand, Losarn drove off with Punch to the headquarters.

For the first time since the beginning of their terrible experiences on the previous afternoon, Mildred realized that she was tired. Cairns, too, felt completely exhausted. Without a word they shook hands and parted, and within half an hour both of them were unconscious in absolutely dreamless sleep.

Yet, such is the fertile power of suggestion and impulse that both awoke just a little while after the bells and whistles had bellowed and shricked out the hour of noon. An hour later, surrounded by almost all the hospital force, they were trying to eat and answer a shower of questions at the same time. Those questions from curious nurses, doctors, internes and orderlies beat down on their heads unceasingly.

Finally they promised them the complete story on returning from Losarn.

"And until then," explained Mildred, "neither doctor nor I understand half of what we have seen."

They arrived at Losarn's house promptly on the hour. The inscrutable Rakko ushered them not into the library of the professor, but to a bright little conservatory, warm as a toast, with flowers blooming and palms and the twittering of birds.

"How sweet! How lovely! How welcome after last night!" exclaimed Mildred.

Cairns pointed merrily at a charming little table shaded with pink lights, made more charming with pink blossoms and set for three; and then the full force of the night's memories overwhelming him again, he pointed to another object, resting on a tabouret near the great bay window

It was the round bundle which Punch had guarded so dearly.

Before they could express further curiosity, Losarn was wheeled into the room with a face bright and smiling and a happy welcome on his lips. He shook hands with Mildred, beaming up at her with the admiration which her brave conduct all through the night had raised, and he gave a warm, companion-like shake to Cairns' hand and a sly wink at both of them.

For some inexplicable reason both Mildred and Cairns blushed at that harmless wink of Losarn.

"Let us close up the problem of the Seven Sharks," said the professor with surprising abruptness. "Be seated there, Mildred. Right there, Cairns. Keep silent; ask your questions afterward; but let me talk now.

"What is the meaning of all that we have seen in the last eighteen hours? How did I manage to anticipate the situations so accurately? Well, Punch is alive. Much of my success was due to the fact that I, and I alone, knew that. But I did not know it, my dear Cairns, until after you had called. Let us review the incidents.

"The Jacobi ten-million-dollar collection of jewels was stolen twenty-five years ago. They are in themselves an enormous fortune, and they were secured by a single master coup of this wonderful criminal—Punch. He learned that the others had planned to kill him and Judy and get the swag for themselves. So he and Judy got away with a suitcase full of jewels.

"Fortunately for Punch, there was a railroad accident on the train on which he and Judy were escaping. With his usual presence of mind, he searched among the bodies until he found one that resembled his own. The face was broken beyond recognition. He filled this body's pockets with jewels and other things that would identify him as Punch. The next day the newspapers carried the news that Punch, the missing robber, had been on the wrecked train, and that his lifeless body, with some of the jewels, had been found.

"I believed that story. I have been watching and waiting for old Judy's return, for I was reasonably certain that she had the jewels, and that sooner or later she would come back to this city. I was fighting the Seven Sharks when they were at their prime; that was when I began as a criminologist, and so I have always been deeply interested in their case. Yesterday afternoon, when I read that an old woman with the famous sign of the Seven and the Shark on her breast had been carried, injured, into the Emergency Hospital, I was sure trouble would follow.

"You know that I am constantly helping out the police when they have their little problems, and through them I had in a measure kept track of this crowd. I knew Munks would see that newspaper story and that the Sharks would be after those jewels.

"You see, I was not mistaken. Munks went to the hospital himself. He identified Judy and then went out to plan his trick. He sent the girl in to watch her and to help out in the work that was to come. From what Muffin said down at headquarters this morning, I understand the original plan was to kidnap Judy. But when Muffin stole in to the hospital and turned the lights out, the girl spy in the bed rushed to him and whispered quickly that the nurse had the secret paper. Muffin then waited no longer, but executed the savage revenge which had been reserved for Judy for twenty-five years. Muffin murdered Mother Judy, and he and the girl overpowered Mildred here and carried her out of the window and down the fire-escape to where Munks had a machine in waiting.

"It was here that the complications began. The kidnaping was witnessed by another interested man—by the bandit Punch. He had been missed by Judy, who had been his companion all these years. He told me this morning she had grown a little insane, a trifle flighty in her old age. She had wandered off in defiance of his oft-repeated warnings. Punch then read what had happened to her in the evening papers, just as Munks and I did. He realized that both Judy and he were now threatened with serious danger.

"At once he started for the Emergency Hospital. Just as he got there he saw Munks at the wheel of an automobile, and a woman being carried into the machine. Instantly he assumed it was Judy. He could do nothing; the machine had vanished into the night before he could budge. He did not know where to look.

"In this predicament he entered the hospital and walked into your private office, Cairns. He hoped somebody in the hospital might give him some information. He heard footsteps, and, forgetting the honest nature of his business, his old instincts automatically asserted themselves. He then slipped behind the long window portières you have there. Then you came in."

"Then," interposed Cairns, "Punch was hiding in that room when I was getting ready to leave?"

"Exactly," answered Losarn, a little impatient at the interruption. "He was watching you through a part of the curtains. That accounts for the curious illusion you had about eyes haunting you. Punch heard you say aloud to yourself that you would go to Losarn; that Losarn would find the way out. Now, Punch had good cause to remember me, though a quarter of a century had passed since I had worried his crowd. He knew it was my ambition then to outwit and capture every man in his gang. He figured to himself then that he could follow the law to the lawbreakers; he was sure Losarn would tell you, Cairns, how to find Munks, and that was exactly what Punch wanted to know.

"Daring scoundrel that he is, he followed you until you got a taxi, and leaped behind it, riding all the way out here and not minding the cold, he said to me, because he was worried about Judy. His attachment to that old woman—peace be to the dead—was pathetic. She was a horrid old criminal, you must realize. Punch eluded the eyes of both your chauffeur and yourself, and he followed you up this hillside. He was outside my library window while you and I were discussing the affair and planning what we should do. He heard all that; he heard that some one was to meet Parr at the railroad station, and, like the astute general that he has always been, he made his plan on the instant.

"Down the hillside he scrambled, and in a sudden, swift tussle had overpowered the taxi-driver. He took away the chauffeur's coat, cap, goggles and gloves, and then tied him to a tree. Then he took his place inside the cab and impersonated the chauffeur when you returned."

"That's why I fancied those eyes again in the cab. I thought it was a ghost," said Cairns to Mildred, and Mildred smiled at him fondly. But Losarn, apparently not at all pleased, proceeded:

"On your arrival at the Pennsylvania Station you started in to engage other cabs on all sides of the station as I had suggested. While you were absent, Ace Wood arrived, driving his own car. Punch recognized him and walked up to him, making the sign of the Seven and the Shark over his breast. He was goggled, and Wood could not recognize him. Wood answered the sign, and, being under the influence of drink, when questioned by Punch, told him the night's trysting-place was the Firelight Lodgings. But when Punch took off his hat and goggles and Wood recognized him, the gambler thought he had seen a ghost, and, being a brave scrapper, he hurled himself furiously at what he thought was an apparition. Punch struck him in self-defense, he says.

"Then Punch waited for Parr to appear. When he did so, Punch walked up to him and told him he was to take him to the Firelight Lodgings. As soon as Parr stepped into the cab Punch followed him and overpowered him, as was later shown when he was marched into the Firelight Lodgings. You know all that happened there; Mildred has told the story.

"Meanwhile your bound chauffeur, out here in this wilderness, had worked himself free, and naturally he made his way up here. When he told me what had happened, I began to believe that Punch's eyes really had been haunting Cairns and that there might be something to the thing after all. Who else but Punch would have had a motive for such queer business?

"Then I realized how serious was the danger that now menaced Cairns. I called Edgewood on the phone and stated the case as urgently to him as I could. He promptly hurried down to Pennsylvania Station, just in time, I believe, to prevent your being arrested for the murder of Ace Wood.

"Your feat, Cairns, of getting the name Firelight Lodgings from Ace Wood before he died saved the day for all of us. You jumped into the machine with Edgewood and started off for there. Meanwhile, we know what happened at the Sharks headquarters. The important point to remember is that up until this time Punch had believed Judy was alive. He thought she was a prisoner of the thieves. He did not know the truth until Mildred told him.

"That made a very different matter of it to Punch. His first idea—revenge—vented itself in locking all in the party up and leaving them to starve to death. Then he escaped through the skylight and hurried back to the hospital.

"We know the daredevil scheme by which he obtained possession of the body of Mother Judy, put it in a sack, and then made off in the night. Then, with a fine spirit, you two children came to me, and it was up to us to capture this strange brigand, who, if he thought we had the clue to the hiding-place of the jewels, would have most certainly marked us for death.

"I had made ready for that problem during your absence. I had been working on it all evening. I tried to figure what I would have done if I had been in Punch's place, and Punch had really lived and had been forced to hide for twenty-five years as he had. Mildred's identification of the matter did clear all doubts, but I was really convinced that Punch was the man before you came. You see, I had figured that if I had been Punch I would go back to my old trade. And you remember that Punch, before he became a Shark, was an expert landscape gardener.

"So I went to the telephone and I called up all the private estates and all the big places where gardens are carefully tended and all the convents and nunneries, asking if they had a gardener and an old woman working there who had disappeared that afternoon.

"Finally this monastery, where we wound up matters this morning, confirmed my judgment. The father told me that Punch and Judy—under other names, of course—had been with them a quarter of a century, and that this was the first time either of them had ever left the grounds.

"When I was told, therefore, that Punch had stolen the body, I assumed rightfully, as it turned out, that he wished to bury it where none could see. It was a bold stroke characteristic of the man, as I then thought. His deeper motive I had not then established.

"I explained a great deal of the situation to the convent priest, and I knew that whatever transpired there this

morning, we would meet with no interference from those inside the convent. But I have no doubt that the whole strange drama in the cloister yard was witnessed by priestly spectators, with shaven heads pressed against the shutter slats.

"Well, there isn't so much left to explain. You know, I had been a rancher in the West when I was young, and I still know how to handle the ropes. Of course, we met some unexpected difficulties. No one looked for the escape of Munks and his fellows; yet that was the thing Munks always did—the unexpected. Poor rascal! I hope the devil will be lenient with him, at first, anyway. Now, have you any questions?"

Cairns had.

"I would like to know two things," he said. "First, how did Munks and his followers, after they had gotten away from Edgewood, know where to go to find Punch?"

"That, I must confess," answered Losarn, "was a question that for a while puzzled me considerably. But Parr very graciously explained to me down at headquarters this morning. They had no idea of trailing Punch. It was Mildred they were after—Mildred, who had the precious paper containing the secret of the hiding-place of the jewels. They had overheard a whispered conversation between you and Mildred in the Firelight Lodgings, in which you had agreed to come out here to Gray Gables. As soon as they were free they hurried out here. But they got here in time to see us speeding away, and they followed us.

"Remember that they escaped in the police patrol. When they saw you watching over the wall they surmised something was up, and used the patrol ladders to reconnoiter. When they saw Punch over the wall they naturally went for him."

Cairns had still another question.

"How did you know where the paper was that Mother Judy gave Mildred?" he demanded. "How did you know it was in my pocket?"

"Telephone again, my dear Cairns; the telephone is really a remarkable institution. You must remember that the observation of patients lying in sick beds is ten times more acute than that of the well man or woman, because the mental faculties are more concentrated. The sick people notice everything. So I called up a nurse at the Emergency Hospital and got her to question every patient in the ward, to see if any one had noticed what you did with the paper the old woman gave you. And one girl said she had seen you pass it to Cairns and that he had tucked it in his upper right-hand pocket. There you are! Any further questions?"

"Yes," put in Mildred. "Where are those jewels?"

Losarn laughed whimsically. He reached for the long, round bundle and placed it across his knees.

"I have here the things in which the Jacobi jewels have been hidden for twenty-five years," he said, and began slowly removing the wrappings of the parcel. When they were all taken off, a curiously fashioned and hinged piece of mahogany was exposed.

"What's that?" they asked him.

"That, my friends," answered Losarn, "is just what I told you it was. It is, or has been, the hiding-place of the Jacobi ten-million-dollar collection of precious stones. It was also the much-prized wooden leg of Mother Judy!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

THE LOOT OF THE SEVEN SHARKS

LOSARN placed the artificial limb down on the floor, with its upper part still held by his hand. From his pocket he drew out a pen-knife and inserted the point of the shining blade into a little screw.

"I may break the blade doing this," he commented; "but it ought to be worth it."

But the blade did not break. Instead, Mildred and Cairns saw it give beneath the lithe, straining fingers, so that presently Losarn could remove it. It left a small opening in the top.

"I have seen one such contraption like this before," observed Losarn, reaching for a little piece of wire, which he evidently had brought there just for that purpose. "Unless one knows how to hnudle them, they are very difficult to open. Who wouldn't be fooled by this old wooden leg now? It would have been thrown on the junk-heap, and with it would have disappeared the Jacobi jewels, for heaven only knows how long."

Pressing the wire down into the opening, from which the screw had been removed, Losarn finally touched a vital spring. He gave it a hard push, and two little doors in one side of the leg flew open.

"Now, Mildred, just hold that basket here, will you?" quoth Losarn. "That's it. For the first time in twenty-five years I shall look again upon the treasured gems of my old friend, Joe Jacobi."

Aye, but they were a wonder to look upon. Such a dazzling glory of fire and brilliance and color had never been seen either by Mildred or Cairns. Even the invalid professor's eyes grew brighter and brighter as they feasted on the cascade of gems that poured forth in a little rattling riot of color from the socket in Mother Judy's leg into the basket the nurse held beneath it.

Trinkets, lockets, necklaces, bracelets, anklets, earrings and chains, all richly set with bijoutry and precious stones, glanced and gleamed amid a torrent of unset brilliants. It was richer than any pirate treasure. Diamonds, catching fire from the sun-glow through the conservatory window, mingled their rich glory with the scarcely lesser radiance of beryls, emeralds, heliotropes, girasols; and there were sards, garnets, opals, peridots, chrysolites, sapphires, rubies, Oriental stones of weird design, torquoise, zircons, jacinths, carbuncles, amethysts, pearls, alexandrites red as the eastern sun, cat's-eyes, bloodstones, hematites and jaspers.

Cairns, whose hobby was jewels, who reveled in each separate stone, spread wide his hands and stared in bewildering enjoyment at the feast of fire and color before him. Mildred folded her hands on her breast and sighed.

But the smile on Losarn's face was more enigmatic than any they had ever seen there before.

"What do you suppose must be done with all this?" he asked soberly.

"Do? Why, return them to the heirs of Jacobi," answered Cairns.

"Good! But suppose there were no reward offered for their return?"

"Reward? I've got my reward," replied Cairns, and with a sudden movement he caught Mildred about the waist and kissed her, right in front of the delighted Losarn. "We fixed it all up on our way out here this afternoon. We're going to be married."

"Eh-eh!" answered Losarn, "things couldn't be better. I half-expected as much. Here is our luncheon-table, set for three. Rakko will serve, and Rakko is most discreet. Rakko never betrays secrets. So you may let me help you plan your honeymon. We'll make it a lavish one, Cairns. South America, Canada, Japan—and if the war is over soon, everywhere else."

"What with?" asked Cairns bluntly.

"With these!" answered Losarn, running his white, slender fingers through the heaping pile of jewels. "With these, my children. Old Jacobi was my best friend, God rest his bones. He had not another friend in the world. He left this entire collection to me. Every stone you see there is legally mine by his will; but I do not deserve them all. I deserve only one-third of them. We have been three adventurers, and we shall share and share alike. One-third shall go to Mildred and one-third to you, Cairns, and one-third to me to play with on long, cold winter evenings."

Cairns and Mildred protested. They said it wasn't fair; but here, as always, the will of Losarn was supreme. He simply insisted, and they bowed to his will.

Then they sat down to luncheon, and Losarn was the merriest of all the party.

AT CAMBRAI

By DR. CHARLES J. PERRY

IT was late at night, and we were in Uncle Sammy Vanner's old raftsman's tavern. With others, we had just finished the stripping of that ancient building of its contents, and the carrying of them to places of safety. An unprecedented flood was raging, and still rising in the river. The tavern, which, from its point of vantage high on the river bank, had defied the floods of half a century, was doomed at last. The bank was rapidly crumbling away. Already the weather-beaten house was trembling and tottering on its foundation. Rain was still falling in torrents. All who had come from the village, half a mile away, to help Uncle Sammy in saving his household goods, had hastened home when the work was done, except Myer and myself. The old landmark was abandoned to its fate. Uncle Sammy's bar had been wide open to us. Although ordinarily I was abstemious, I had visited the bar frequently that night. So had Myer. He was flushed with drink, and so was I. An old pack of cards lay on the bar. Myer had spied it. He delighted in a game. So did I. The pack of cards was a reminder to him, hence, reckless from drink, he challenged me to a game.

I saw the officer raise his pistol and fire. The bullet struck me in the breast. I fell beneath its shock.

The drink that was in my head would not have made me accept the challenge. I knew that within an hour the tavern must go down with the ever-dashing flood. To remain under its roof meant death, except through Providential rescue. But if one single drop of liquor had not passed my lips that night I would have accepted the hot-headed Myer's challenge just as quickly in face of all the peril. Myer had won from me the girl I loved—the girl I had hoped to soon make my wife. At least, I thought I had the best of reason to believe he had. I hated him. It was in my heart to kill him. I had fully determined to kill him. Here was my opportunity, although it might mean my own death as well as his. I cared nothing for that. Nancy Hare was lost to me, and what was life worth? So Fred Myer had barely uttered the words of a challenge before I accepted.

"Nothing could give me greater pleasure," said I, closing the tavern door.

The surging waters seemed to smite the steadily caving bank with increased violence at that moment, for the tavern sank so far on the side next the river that a hickory rafting-pin lying on the floor rolled from the opposite side of the room quickly across the slanting floor, and struck the base-board smartly. Myer paled a trifle, but without another word vaulted to the bar, sat sidewise upon it, and began shuffling the cards. I was soon mounted opposite him, and the game began. The room was but dimly lighted by a single lamp that hung on the wall.

I don't know at what limit Myer would have called a halt in the game. I knew what the limit of my game was to be. I sat there and calmly calculated it. It was to be when the old tavern went crashing down with the howling flood that had already marked its doom, taking my rival to destruction with it—and myself, too, if so it must be! We played with changing luck. The rain beat against the tavern windows. For some time Myer had been growing nervous and uneasy. The peril of the situation had sobered him. I was possessed of a fiendish exhilaration. At last Myer exclaimed:

"What nonsense this is, Babbington! Let's get out of here!"

"It's your deal!" I replied, tossing my ante on the table.

He dealt the cards without another word. Myer was a foreigner. His father, a widower, had spent his sum-

mers for years at the little village of Sawford, in the Pennsylvania Mountains. This year he had remained North. I did not know then what kept him in this little town. His only son, Fred, had grown from a boy that I had liked into a wild, reckless, heartless man that I hated.

Myer dealt the cards. After the draw I held a rare hand—four aces. What Myer had drawn I did not know until years afterward. But hands mattered nothing to me. Not then. Myer had raised my ante and I had raised him back, when the house shook as it might have been shaken by an earthquake. There was a sound of roaring, wild-rushing waters, and I felt the old tavern careening and sliding forward. Myer dropped from the bar and dashed toward the door. I sprang after him to prevent his escape, but slipped and fell. Before I regained my feet he had opened the door. The building, in sliding off with the caving bank, had left a space of six feet between it and the ragged edge of the bank. In that space, which was rapidly widening, the mad water lashed and roared. With a wild leap Myer cleared that chasm and escaped, but by the breadth of a hair; my grasp would have drawn him back and plunged him into the seething torrent. Above the tumult of the flood and storm I heard his mocking laugh, and the curse he hurled back at me through the awful gloom.

In sliding along with the rushing water, the building had righted, but it was filling rapidly with water. The wreck of the old landmark was quickly swept along to join the crowding, crackling, thundering procession of ruin that had filled the river for days. The water came rushing in so fast that I had already been forced to climb upon the bar to escape it. I knew that safety there was but momentary. As I stood on the bar, expecting momentarily the crash that was to consign me to the grinding flood, my eyes caught sight of the cards. Both hands lay, one card upon another, face down. Mechanically I picked them up. I was about to look at the hand Myer had drawn, but from some inexplicable impulse I desisted, and placed both hands in my pocket. I don't know why I did so, with death staring me in the face. Something told me to.

The expected crash came at a moment when the flood, it appeared to me, was at its wildest. I never knew how it came. I did not know anything, in fact, until I saw the gray dawn struggling feebly in the east. The rain had ceased. I must have lain unconscious for hours. I was lying on a portion of a wrecked raft which had been forced between two trees on the edge of a high bank, and held there safe from further danger from the flood. I struggled to my feet. The country roundabout was strange to me. I saw a village nestling among the trees half a mile away. I made my way to it across the river flats. The flood had borne me a hundred miles from Sawford, they told me at the village.

Patriotism overflowing the land, I enlisted and went to France to get into the war. A year later I one day read the following in an American newspaper which had been sent over with other reading matter for the Americans in the French trenches:

MARRIED:—At Sawford, Pa., on the 3d inst., by the Rev. James Todd, Frederick Myer, Esq., to Miss Nancy Hare.

After that I fought in many bloody battles. I felt that I could gladly welcome death, but I passed scathless through them all.

When I enlisted I had sealed the poker hand I drew that night in the flood-besieged tavern and the one Fred Myer would have held each in an envelope, with my name on one and Myer's name on the other, and placed them in the inside pocket of my coat. I carried them there always. I didn't know why.

Battle after battle, and at last Cambrai. Somehow my career had led me to a captaincy in my regiment. My company was in the thickest of the fight on that immortal field. It came to a hand-to-hand combat with a detachment of desperate Germans. We fought together like fiends. A thick pall of smoke hung over us. Once it cleared for a moment. Through the shifting cloud I saw dimly the face of a Prussian officer. Its resemblance to Fred Myer startled me, but instantly the improbability of it drove the thought from my mind. As the cloud of smoke was again closing I saw this officer raise his pistol and fire. The bullet struck me in the breast. I fell beneath its shock. Later, when they cared for me, the bullet was found. It was in the flesh just over my heart. It had passed through the two poker hands I carried there.

"The cards saved your life!" said the French surgeon.

When invalided home I roamed the country over, restless and aimless. I made money in mines, I made money in cattle, I made money in many ways. I followed the tide into the White Pine silver country. One night, straggling into a mining camp gambling hell, I noticed a dissipated-looking but well-dressed man sitting alone at a table. The face was much changed, but I was sure I recognized it. The terrible night in the old tavern, the apparition at the French battlefield passed before me once more. Composing myself, I walked to where the man was sitting, sat down at the other end of the table, took from my pocket the envelope containing my old poker hand and the envelope containing the one Myer had held, and tossed the latter on the table in front of the man before me.

"There were fifteen dollars in the pot, and I had raised you back ten, when you quit the game that night at Uncle Sammy Vanner's tavern!" said I, gazing coolly into his face. "There's your hand. Will you play the game out?"

Myer (for he it was) turned pale as he gazed at me and, rising from his chair, exclaimed:

"Good God, Babbington! Have you come from the dead?"

"Not having been among the dead, no!" I replied. "That's your hand. It's just as good as it was before that bullet-hole went through it. This is my hand that I raised you ten on. What are you going to do to it? I have never looked at your cards."

Myer sat down. He was as cool now as I was. I threw twenty-five dollars on the table. Myer had by this time taken his hand from the envelope and looked at it.

"It's the same hand, by ——!" he cried. "And it's a hard one to beat. Let me see. You drew one card, if I remember right. Filled your flush, may be. Raise you fifty!"

I stood the raise, of course, and made it fifty better. He raised me a hundred.

"I'd advise you to lay down if you haven't got better than four of a kind," said he. "Didn't I see you at Cambrai—time of the big fight?"

That was a startling question. I looked up quickly. He was the apparition, then, after all!

"Perhaps," said I. "I got the bullet-hole through these cards in France."

"Just my luck!" said Myer. "I put that bullet through those cards myself! I didn't know the cards were there, though. But I had it pointed right, didn't I?"

I had half-risen from my chair and was glaring fiercely at Myer, as he made that murderous confession with all the coolness of a man owning up to having shot his neighbor's cat.

"On fair field of battle, Babbington!" he exclaimed. "Fair field of battle. What do you do to that raise? Hundred better, eh? Good enough! Give you my word, though, that I rather took advantage of its being fair field of battle. I thought you were dead—drowned, you know, the night I laid this hand down temporarily—and when I saw you at Cambrai you rather scared me at first. Couple hundred more than you."

I played mechanically. There was something in the manner of Myer that aroused me and set my brain awhirl.

"You must think a heap of that hand!" he went on. "It wants to be a good one, too, if it beats mine. Raise you three hundred. Yes. Thought you were drowned. Everybody in Sawford thought so. Then I saw you in Europe, fighting for your country. I was there fighting for mine, for I was born in Germany. You needn't come back at me so savage, Babbington. You can't scare my hand out! Five hundred better. So I says, 'Well, well! The little lady told me to my face that it never could be; that she'd mourn him as long as she lived, because she loved him and it was all her fault; and here he is alive! She can't mourn him if he's alive!' says I. 'So I'll put him in shape fit for her to mourn him!' That's what I said, and being fair field of battle, I tried to do it. But these cursed cards—— I won't tell you how I deserted, got in Holland and came back to this country."

"Myer!" I shouted, springing to my feet, unable longer to control myself, "she is your wife, and yet——"

"Keep cool, Babbington," said Myer, with an ugly look in his eyes. "Sit down and play. I've raised you another five hundred. She isn't my wife. You are probably thinking of my old gov'nor. Gov'nor married her Aunt Nancy, you know. What do you do to my raise?"

"Call it," said I, wild with joyful excitement.

Myer showed down his hand.

A straight flush!

"I told you it was a great hand!" he exclaimed, glaring at the cards. "But I give you my word, I'd rather have lost a million such pots as this man than had those cursed cards in my way at Cambrai."

He flung his hand savagely on the table, raked off the money—three thousand dollars good—mingled hurriedly with the crowd, and I saw him no more. I gathered up his hand and mine, put them again next my heart, this time rejoicing in them, and loving them, and fled from the place. Myer had won, yet lost. I had lost, yet won.

A fortnight later, holding the grimy cards in her hands, and gazing with tear-dimmed eyes at the ragged track of the bullet through them, my sweet Nancy pressed them to her lips.

"I love them, Julius," she said, "because they saved your life and brought you back to me!"

LUMINOUS FISH OF THE OCEAN

STRANGE, indeed, has been the evolution of the organs of sight of the practically blind fish, which live in the total darkness of the depths of the ocean, where no ray of light ever penetrates. In some the eyes are very small; in others they are large and round, as if in a struggle to catch some faint gleam of brightness. One-fifth of these fish possess a luminous organ on some part of the body.

Several varieties of fish living near the surface carry lights, among them the "lantern fish" of the Malay Archipelago and another recently discovered in Jamaican waters. All these have a large, luminous organ just below the eye, emitting a greenish-white light, which flickers at regular intervals. Some deep-sea fish have the light attached to a long movable tip. Some of these are probably real lanterns, others decoys in the pursuit of prey.

"I'LL SURPRISE 'ER"

By MARSHALL P. WILDER

IT was three o'clock in the morning. Five men sat around a table covered with green cloth in an upper room of a prominent New York club. They were playing poker. Green had been playing for nine hours and drinking quite freely between deals. Suddenly his head fell upon the table. He had accumulated a somnambulistic jag. The game went on without him. At four o'clock he appeared to wake up. Sitting up in his chair he drew off his coat. Folding the garment neatly, he laid it carefully over the jackpot in the middle of the table. The players quit in open-mouthed amazement and watched Green as he took off his vest and placed it, neatly folded, on top of the coat. Then he removed his trousers, and these garments also went to swell the jackpot. His shoes and stockings followed suit. He now stood in the middle of the room clothed only in his undergarments and an inane smile, while he rubbed his eyes and yawned in the manner of the man overcome with sleep. The door opened to admit a waiter. A cold draft from the door struck Green and he shivered a little. The cold partially awakened him. He reached for his shoes and carefully clothed himself again, putting his stockings into his coat-pocket. All this had been done in perfect silence. Only when the door had closed behind Green did the players find relief in a simultaneous ejaculation relating to their probable future destiny. Then the game was resumed.

Meanwhile Green had found his way home. He climbed up-stairs, muttering to himself:

"I'll s'prise 'er!—(hic)—I'll s'prise 'er!"

He managed to find the bathroom, and for half an hour his anxious wife heard him splashing and blowing in the tub. Just as she was about to get out of bed to investigate, the door opened and Green stood before her.

"Goo'-mornin'!" he said in affectionate but broken accents. "How's my ni-ni-ni-tingale 's morn'?"

"Why, George, you foolish fellow!" exclaimed his horror-stricken wife. "Where have you been?"

"Wher'v I bin?—(hic)—d'y'say? M'love, I've bin takin' a bath."

"A-bath!" shrieked his wife in a gale of laughter. "Are you crazy? Why, you've forgotten to take off your clothes!"

MICKY FINN'S FIRECRACKER

By ERNEST JARROLD

IT was the evening previous to July 4th. The air was filled with fire. All nature was athirst. The grass in the meadow was as dry as Mike Finn's throat on the evening before pay-day. The flies and mosquitoes bit Mr. Finn's bald head with vindictive malice as he sat in the kitchen of his shanty, behind the trellis of morning-glory vines, which climbed like Jack-the-Giant-Killer's beanstalk over the window.

Mr. Finn had eaten a hearty meal of corned beef and cabbage, and had drank a quart of mixed ale and pepper. He was now smoking and enjoying that gentle contemplation which is intimately associated with repletion and tobacco. He was fast journeying over the borderland of consciousness into the land of sleep, when a loud whisper under the window awoke him with a start. Parting the morning-glory vines gently, he saw his bare-footed boy Mickey and Jack Doolan seated under the window in earnest conversation. Jack was speaking. Said he:

"We'll blow your father up wid a ten-cent firecracker!"

"But it might hurt him, Jack," said Mickey.

"Faith it will not, thin," replied Jack. "'Twill only scare him a bit and make him jump."

In fancy Mickey saw his father springing from his chair with dilated eyes, sputtering with rage and fear, and he chuckled with joy.

"Oh-ho!" he laughed. "He'll think the roof fell in!"

"Faix, he will," said Doolan, grinning in the darkness like a Judas at the thought of the whaling Mickey would receive from the leather strap when his father recovered from the shock. Then Doolan continued:

"Where did you hide the big firecracker, Mickey?"

"Behind St. Patrick's picture in the front-room," replied Mickey. "We'll take it out at nine o'clock to-morrow night and put it under father's chair."

Mr. Finn had heard all he wanted to know. He arose softly and walked to the door. Yawning sleepily, he looked down at the plotters and exclaimed:

"What divilmint are ye lads up to now? Come, Mickey, 'tis time you were in bed. Run home, Jack. Ye'll want to be gettin' up early in the mornin'. Good-night," he continued, as Jack slunk off through the gloom.

Mr. Finn laid his hand tenderly on his boy's shoulder as he was about to climb the stairs to his room in the garret. "Mickey," said he, "have ye enough money for fireworks to-morrow? Here's twenty-five cents more. Ye might need it. Be careful ye don't do anybody any harrum."

Mickey took the money mechanically; there was a lump in his throat and he was on the verge of a confession, when Mr. Finn entered the kitchen and closed the door. He resumed his seat at the window and relighted his pipe.

"So they're going to blow the ould man up, are they?" he mused. "Ha, ha! I wonder will they now? I'll go and look at that firecracker they are going to blow me up wid."

A minute later the firecracker stood on the table before him like a British soldier on dress parade. A mosquito lit on its crimson jacket, unconscious that it was trifling with a powder mine. Mr. Finn grinned as he looked. He took his jack-knife from his pocket and opened one end of the cracker, pouring the contents of the paper cylinder upon the table. Then he refilled the cracker with moist clay, replacing the stems as he had found them, and concealing his work so deftly that a most careful examination would have been necessary to detect the fraud. Carefully putting the firecracker behind the picture where he had found it, Mr. Finn went to bed.

On the morning of the Fourth, when the air was redolent of powder and a popping fire as of skirmishers resounded all over Coney Island, Mr. Finn went down to the grocery and bought an exact duplicate of the firecracker which was now useless for explosive purposes. This he carefully hid in his pocket and carried around with him all day, impatiently waiting for the night to come. Meanwhile Doolan had industriously circulated around the Island the news that old man Finn was to be blown up that night in his shanty, and soon after supper the neighbors strayed in, as if by accident, to see the fun. Blind Murphy came in with his fiddle; One-Legged Tim, who kept the cows off the railway track, limped in later, covered with perspiration; Mike Welsh and his wife dropped in "as they were passin'," and they kept coming until the kitchen would hold no more. There was as much ceremony about the blowing up of old man Finn as if he were about to be cremated alive. In popular estimation, it would be a fitting climax to the innumerable explosions which had preceded it—everybody would have a good laugh at Mr. Finn's expense, and the day would come to a jolly ending all around.

Mr. Finn was aware of all this, although he was supposed to be the only one ignorant of it, as he welcomed his guests with a grin which broadened as the evening waned away. The interest was kept up by the arch conspirators, Doolan and Mickey, by passing the big firecracker surreptitiously around the room, provoking many expressions of half-repressed wonder.

There were so many visitors that Doolan and Mickey were forced to share a nail-keg. The keg was an ordinary one, save for the fact that Mr. Finn had carefully cut a large hole in the side during the afternoon. The suspense was fast becoming tense as a bowstring, when Mr. Finn said:

"Now, Mickey, all the neighbors have been so kind as to call on us this evenin', and as you are the only one that has eddicashun, mebbe you could tell us something about the firecrackers you have been shootin' off all day. Who was it invinted the firecrackers?"

This question was hailed as a means of relief. It permitted One-Legged Tim to take his fingers out of his ears, and Mike Welsh sighed audibly as the strain on his nerves was relaxed.

"Firecrackers were invented in the fourteenth century by the Chinase," replied the boy oracularly.

This reply provoked no audible comment, for all eyes were fixed anxiously upon Doolan, who was going through a dumb show of touching the clay-loaded firecracker with a piece of lighted punk and causing every one in the room except Mr. Finn to shiver with apprehension. Doolan

caused a little temporary diversion by standing the big firecracker close to Mrs. Murphy's chair and touching the fuse with the punk. She jumped screaming from her chair, but Doolan nipped the fire out before it had burned an inch.

Mr. Finn made a fine pretense of not seeing any of the by-play, although he was smothering the laughter which threatened to burst forth every minute. Then he continued his catechism:

"Mickey, my lad, if wan of thim big ten-cent firecrackers were set off in the room now what would happen?"

"Well," replied the boy, reflectively, "if wan of thim big red cannons went off in here, I suppose all the glass in the windys would be smashed to little bits, and there'd be paper enough scattered around to fill a barrel. The room would be filled wid smoke and——"

"Oh, God save us!" exclaimed Mrs. Murphy, "lave me out of this! The hate is killin' me!" rushing out on the back stoop to relieve her overstrained nerves.

When the excitement had subsided a little, Mr. Finn resumed:

"They must be mighty powerful, Mickey, mighty powerful!"

"Shure," resumed the youthful plotter, giving Doolan a dig in the ribs to indicate that the time was ripe to blow Mr Finn through the roof. "Shure; don't they use them in Senegambia to put murderers to death? They just put the red cannon under a water-pail, with the murderer on top of the pail, and when the bang comes you wouldn't find that much of him as 'ud grease a griddle."

While Mickey was imparting this cheerful information, Doolan had slyly placed the cannon cracker beneath Mr. Finn's chair, lit the fuse, and resumed his place on the nail-keg beside Mickey. A death-like silence pervaded the room. Every eye but those of the supposed victim was fixed upon the gently hissing fuse. Indeed, so absorbed was the company that no one noticed that Mr. Finn had leaned over and touched the glowing end of a five-cent cigar to another big cracker, and dropped it in the hole in the side of the nail-keg. The fuse under Mr. Finn hissed for a few moments, spluttered and went out. A murmur of disappointment ran around the room, then came the crash. An explosion like that of a bombshell shook the shanty to its foundation. The universe was apparently turned upside-down. The nail-keg struck the ceiling and a rain of plaster fell upon the company. All the lamps were blown out. A chorus of babel shrieks arose. The smell of powder filled the room. The air was filled with a rain of paper.

When Mr. Finn lit a lamp Doolan lay across the table, while Mickey had been blown so forcibly into the aldermanic proportions of Mrs. Casey, that she was thrown upon her back on the floor, where she lay kicking and screaming with fear.

Mr. Finn, the only cool person in the room, laughed until the building rang with his mirth. He lifted Mrs. Casey to her feet and said soothingly:

"I hope you've had a pleasant evenin', Mrs. Casey. Come around again, allanna, thim divils of boys will be sure to find some gentle amusement for ye. Good-night, Tim; good-night, Murphy! Ho, ho! thim boys are great jokers! Stop in, all of ye, when ye are passin'!"

A GREAT APPLE ORCHARD

WITHOUT going into statistics deeply regarding apple-growing in our country, be it said that the recent census showed upward of 150,000,000 trees in bearing and more than 65,000,000 trees that will come into bearing within a few years. In this connection it is interesting to note that the geographic division of the country designated as the East North Central (comprising the States of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan and Wisconsin) leads all other divisions in this respect, the number of trees in bearing in these States being reported as follows: Ohio, 8,504,886; Indiana, 5,764,821; Illinois, 9,900,627; Michigan, 7,534,343; Wisconsin, 2,430,322.

The figures for trees not in bearing in this region range from one million to three million per State. In productive value of the crop, however, this division is second to the Middle Atlantic division, rated as the most ideal apple-growing section of the world. This division includes the great apple States of New York, with nearly 14,000,000 trees, and Pennsylvania, with more than 10,000,000 trees. Fruit-growing in New York has assumed such large proportions and has been pursued so long that it is way beyond the experimental stage. There is no State where conditions are more favorable or where the industry is so firmly established.

EARTH MAY ENDURE 180,000,000 YEARS

APPARENTLY all is off!

This little old battle-scarred earth, a mere clay marble among the billiard balls of the great solar systems, is headed for the giant sun Vega, and humping itself at a gait of 540,000,000 miles a year!

But there is no justification for that instant desire to get off and walk, says the Seattle *Post-Intelligencer*. We need not worry about what will happen when our speedy little sphere reaches its present destination. It will be our descendants of 180,000,000 years hence that will be yelling for a transfer to some other line. And even when that time comes there is a possibility that Vega will have sidestepped or ducked, so we can whiz right by.

So S. L. Boothroyd, associate professor of astronomy at the University of Washington, told a large audience of men and women at the W. O. W. Hall, Fourth avenue and Marion street recently, in a letter on "The Nebulæ of the Stars."

The eclipse of the sun, which will be almost complete in Seattle on June 8 next, will be one of the most remarkable sights ever permitted man to see, declared Professor Boothroyd. Yet, astronomers with powerful telescopes can witness an eclipse every fifty-eight hours, if they wish to. The star Algol, which is a huge sun, and is located in the northern heavens at this time of year in the sword-hand of Perseus, is eclipsed every fifty-eight hours by a dark star that passes between it and the earth. This accounts, says Professor Boothroyd, for the fact that Algol will gradually grow dim, and then within a few minutes flash up brightly again.

New worlds and suns are in process of creation in the heavenly nebulæ, said Professor Boothroyd. The rarified gases composing the nebulæ, and which consist of atomic particles less complex than the atoms of iron and mercury on our sphere, are gradually becoming more dense. After countless ages they may become solid planets, or some cataclysm of the heavens may so heat the particles composing them that they will become suns.

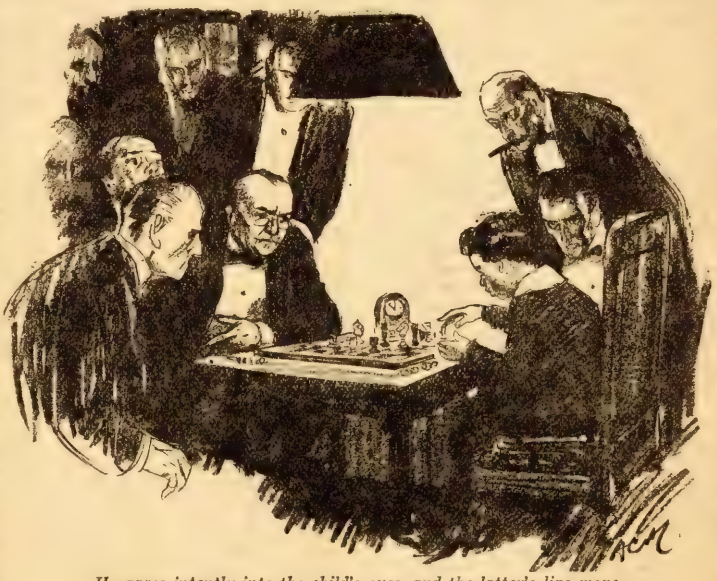
BY TIME-LIMIT

By MORTIMER FELTENSTEIN

I

"GENTLEMEN, there is something more than mere bluster behind my words. I am willing to stake one-quarter of a million of American dollars on the soundness of my judgment. I repeat that I shall produce my son, a child ten years old, in comparison with whom the most skilful of you will be the merest tyros. If any of you have the courage to pick up the gauntlet I have thrown down, I am ready within one hour to place a certified check for $250,000 into the hands of any responsible stakeholder that may be designated. What say you, gentlemen?"

The scene is the famous Occident Club of San Francisco—a club whose membership-list includes almost all the Western millionaires, bonanza kings and railroad magnates. Its palatial home is situated on one of the most fashionable streets of that city, and within its portals nightly there is wagered, lost and won fortunes, which to express would require at least five figures.



He gazes intently into the child's eyes, and the latter's lips move.

No game of skill or hazard known to the civilized world but finds the devotees willing to offer up sacrifice on its altar; no honored foreigner, to whom the hospitality of the club is extended, ever leaves disappointed in a desire to engage in his national game, whatever that might be.

On the evening on which the reader is ushered into this temple of opulence, a stranger presents himself at the door and delivers to the president a sealed letter of introduction from a member who is now abroad on a tour of the world. The letter describes him as an Indian gentleman of independent fortune, who is about to visit the United States in quest of novelty. "I met Mr. Myrrheli in Bombay," the letter goes on, "and I met him none too soon. I don't recollect much about the affair; it all happened so quickly that its details failed, I suppose, to imprint themselves on the wax of my memory. All I remember is going out one evening, and being set upon in the shadows of a street-lamp by a gang of thugs. The next moment my throat was encircled by an iron grasp, the blood throbbed tumultuously in my temples, and my eyes were blinking painfully at the scintillating glitter of half a dozen blades flashing around my head. I've been in a good many hard places in my day, in the good old times of Forty-nine, but never before was I so near dying with my boots on. I was just about ready to surrender the ghost; the steel was within an inch of my breast, when a pistol-shot rang out so near that my ears were momentarily deafened. There was a shrill shriek from one of my assailants, then the entire mob dropped me like lead and ran.

"The man that saved my life was Mr. Myrrheli, who, as my good fate would have it, happened along in the nick of time. I cultivated his acquaintance afterward, as you may suppose; he is a royal good fellow, despite the fact that he is an Indian, and a sport way down to his toes. From which series of facts as a premise, I deduce that you must make him welcome, for my sake."

The letter is characteristic; and to the president every line exhales the effervescent nature of his old friend Dumphrey. With such an open sesame there is little fear that the door of hospitality will remain closed against the stranger; on the contrary, all present crowd around him, anxious to shake the hand that has saved a brother's life.

The foreigner is about thirty-five years old, rather under-

sized, dark-visaged, wiry; with a sharp, thin face and high forehead, spanned by eyes of an intense blackness, looking into which a man feels as if he stands gazing into a stream of some atramentous liquid, whose depth is infinite. His face is clean-shaven, and his thin, bloodless lips shut tightly over teeth whose immaculate pearliness causes them to gleam when he smiles with an unpleasant luster; and this sinister effect is emphasized by a peculiar upward twitch of the lips when they expand in good-humor. About his dress there is nothing remarkable, except that it fits his lithe form perfectly.

"Tremendously glad to know you, you know," for the hundredth time repeats young Dick Travis, who has recently been elevated to the social importance of a multi-millionaire by the lamented death of an uncle; "delighted, by Jove! Say, Dumphrey must have felt creepy shivers running down his spinal column just about then, eh? Well, I guess! Have something? Serves him right, anyway. Why in thunder does he have to go poking his nose into other people's countries for? Why couldn't he stay at home and play poker like a sane man, eh?"

Mr. Myrrheli politely confesses ignorance on this dubious point, observing in faultless English, and with but the slightest of accents, that the mental condition of a person who prefers to travel rather than play poker at home is indeed inexplicable.

"Queer duck," whispers Dick Travis to a friend. "Say, he looks the picture of one of those esoteric fellows you read about, don't you know; one of those occult chaps and Eastern adepts, who juggle their souls out of their bodies and then travel through space in astral form to save railroad expenses. All the same, I wonder if he plays poker?"

"Why not ask him?" suggested his friend.

"Not yet; wait. But, Jove, what eyes! Did you notice them? They stab right through a fellow, don't you know."

The stranger saunters through the spacious rooms, admiring the sumptuousness of the furnishings and remarking the air of rigid exclusiveness that seems to pervade the atmosphere of the place. He finally stops at a table where several persons are engaged in a game of chess. The white host is managed by a keen-eyed, broad-browed, middle-aged man, whilst the sable army is under the command of several who play in consultation. It is obvious that the general of the white forces is more than a match for the combined strength of his adversaries. Myrrheli stands watching the vicissitudes of the mimic battle, smiling faintly now and then as the allies make a particularly weak move.

"Mr. Harding is a strong player?" he whispers to a bystander, with a note of interrogation in his voice. He has had an introduction to Harding in the former part of the evening.

"Strong player! He is considered one of the greatest chess masters in the world."

"Indeed! A member of the professional ranks, I presume?"

"Oh, no; he's worth ten millions, if he's worth a cent; plays for the love of the game, you know. But I've heard it said by competent judges that he's a match for the best European players."

"Thank you." He now follows the game with increased interest.

"Mate in eight moves," announces Harding, whereat the allies look incredulous. Harding smiles, and the game is continued; but the eighth move sees the checkmate accomplished.

Jeffrey Harding looks up and his eyes meet those of Myrrheli.

"Ah," says he genially, "I see you have been watching our game, Mr. Myrrheli. Are you interested in chess?"

"Very much, indeed; but there my claims rest. I am but an indifferent player."

"You will pardon me if I decline to accept your word as to that. I should be delighted if you would allow me to judge for myself."

"Oh, certainly," smiles the Indian, "if you can afford to waste your time on such as I."

Myrrheli sits down, the pieces are arranged, and Harding gives the advantage of the move to the guest. There is a curious glitter of satisfaction in the Indian's eye as he pushes the king's pawn two squares. The game proceeds, but the American wins without apparent effort.

"Oh, but you must give me my revenge. I do not propose to allow you to demolish my forces so easily the next time," says Myrrheli good-humoredly.

Harding bows assent. The result, notwithstanding Myrrheli's increased exertion, is the same.

"You see, I was right," observes the guest, lightly shrugging his shoulders and waving his hand to signify that the inevitable must be accepted. But after a moment's hesitation: "I think I know somebody whom you would have much more difficulty in overcoming; whom—er—in fact, I do not think you could—er——"

"I see," says Harding with interest; "a compatriot of yours?"

By this time the room is well filled with members, who have been drawn hither by curiosity to witness the issue of the contest between their champion and the stranger. They believe Harding to be invincible. The Indian's words to them savor of impertinence.

"Well, yes," Myrrheli says in answer to Harding's question; "in fact, a son of mine."

"A son of yours?" raising his eyebrows. "He must still be quite young."

"He is—he is not yet ten."

A moment of silence, and then a roar of laughter greets this announcement. That speech of his is not only impertinent, but stupid as well. Harding flushes.

"That's one on you, Harding!" cries Dick Travis, when the cachinnatory storm partly subsides.

"I beg your pardon," says Harding to the Indian coldly, without deigning to notice the last remark; "did I understand you to say——" A wondering stare ends the question.

"Yes, sir; I said that my son, who is ten years old, will easily hold his own against you. I will go further, gentlemen," turning to the spectators; "I will say that there is not a person present in this room whom my son cannot defeat in a match."

Several shrug their shoulders, as if to intimate that they will not attempt to explain the particular form of mental aberration from which their guest is suffering. Others smile in derision. At this moment Dick Travis steps briskly forward. He winks mischievously at Harding. He evidently intends to enjoy a little fun at the stranger's expense.

"Now, that's a thundering big opinion to be responsible for, Mr. Myrrheli," he begins, punctuating every couple of words with an additional wink to his fellow members. "You see, we Westerners out here have an unswerving faith in the eloquence of the yellow metal, and all our oratorical jobs we assign to this Demosthenes. He has a voice musical enough to charm ears that are deaf to Beethoven, and strong enough to be heard at the Antipodes. A vulgar fellow might express the same truth by telling you that 'money talks,' don't you know; and of course, you, as a sport, are——"

It is now that the Indian rises, and, without any apparent excitement, utters the words which open this story. There is an interval of astonished silence. This is more

than Dick has bargained for. There can be no question that the Indian is sincere; his manner and tone are sufficient guarantee of that. But two hundred and fifty thousand dollars! Who ever heard of such a sum wagered on the issue of a chess contest? And what a chess contest! A boy of ten opposed to one of the world's greatest players! Two hundred and fifty thousand dollars! Who is this man who speaks so lightly of risking a king's ransom on the skill of a child? An Eastern nabob to whom money is as sand? An Indian Monte Cristo?

At length Myrrheli breaks the silence.

"So, gentlemen," says he, with a quiet laugh, which nevertheless sends a thrill of exasperation through his hearers, "your yellow Demosthenes has suddenly lost his voice, it seems. You are not inclined, I perceive, to repose any pecuniary confidence in your champion. Mr. Travis," turning to the latter worthy, and speaking very softly, "I do not suppose you intended to be taken seriously, so I——"

"By heavens!" bursts out Dick, "you can't ring in bluff on us for genuine grit. I'll call your ante and force you to a show-down, you bet. If you've got the nerve to support your words by a roll of bank bills, then produce your infant phenomenon, and, by thunder, I've got $250,000 that says Harding 'll eat him up."

"Excuse me," puts in Harding quietly, "but it seems to me that I'm the party most concerned. Mr. Myrrheli, if you are in earnest, I accept your offer."

"No, sir-ee," roars Dick Travis, "you can't freeze me out of this for a good deal. I was the first one to pick up this doughnut, and whether it belongs to you or not, I want a share. Harding, I'll go you halves."

"Very well, that is a bargain, if Mr. Myrrheli is still of the same mind."

"I see no reason to change it," asserts the Indian.

"Then the wager is made; have you any conditions to offer as regards the match?"

"None; except that I should prefer a time-limit."

"Will twenty moves an hour do?"

"Perfectly."

"Have you no suggestion to offer as to the number of games to be played?"

"Suit yourself as to that."

"Then I propose a rubber of three games; two victories to win the match, draws not counting."

"That is satisfactory to me. Let me see; it is now twenty minutes of eleven. Do you see any objections, Mr. Harding, to settling our friendly little dispute to-night? I have certified checks amounting to the necessary sum in my rooms, and if you are willing, they, together with my son, shall be here within the next hour?"

"Oh, there are no objections to that from our side. Mr. Belvey here will act as stakeholder, if you have none else in mind. We, however, do not happen to have certified checks about us for the required amount. If you——"

"Don't mention it; any ordinary check, or your word of honor for that matter, is equally satisfactory. Good-night, gentleman, I shall soon have the pleasure of rejoining you."

Curiously enough, no one at the moment thinks it at all singular that Myrrheli should have had certified checks for so enormous a sum without possessing any foreknowledge—as indeed how could he—of the use to which they would be put.

II

"Philoston, it worked like a charm."

"What! You haven't succeeded so soon?" in a tone of delighted incredulity.

"Completely. It all happened as we had planned. I allowed Harding to win a couple of games from me, and then nagged him and a fellow named Travis into accepting a bet for $250,000 that Harding could not win a match played against my son—my son; good, is it not?

"You see, the letter of introduction allayed whatever suspicions might have been excited at the largeness of the wager. They believe that Dumphrey really wrote it for me in Bombay. He was the easiest subject I ever practised on—a look straight into his eyes, and 'Write,' I cry, and he writes."

"But Harding will not prove so tractable a subject. I know him. He is a man of iron will."

"Pshaw! What care I for that! Not for nothing did I pass the best days of my life among the Inner Circle of Adepts in the mountains of Thibet. I know my business. Besides, I have already told you hypnotizing him will be only a last resource. I am confident that I am his superior as a player; I have defeated better men than he is. The suggestion of the boy as a part of the scheme was a stroke of inspiration. Had I offered to bet $250,000 on myself, the natural answer would have been: 'My dear sir, we must know something more about your record as a player.' But who would hesitate to back a man like Harding against a ten-year-old boy? For how should they suspect that the child will be a mere living automaton, as it were, to act the will of my intelligence?"

Not so long ago John Philoston had been an honored scion of an honored house, the acknowledged leader of his set. But wine, women—of the Lalun kind—and cards plunged him into a current of dissipation which held its victim in its frigid embrace, till it finally cast him on the reef of social ostracism. No man needs be moral; but all men must seem to be. When, therefore, tales of doubtful honesty began to assail the ears of society about its darling and prince, society was perforce compelled to shed the scales wherewith it had wilfully blinded itself to his true character, and the edict went forth to "cut him dead." He was "cut dead," expelled from the Occident Club, of which he was a member, and then this leader of cotillions slid gradually down the decline of respectability, till at the time we meet him his fondest boast was that he was the most expert card sharp on the Pacific Slope.

A lucky season of plunging at the race-course had made him temporarily rich; it was then that he chanced upon Myrrheli doing a "turn" in a music-hall in one of these mushroom mining camps which disfigure the Far West like so many pockmarks. A partnership between them was soon formed, and a plot soon concocted whereby Philoston's money and Myrrheli's powers of diablerie might be jointly turned to profitable account. Dumphrey was then contemplating a tour of the world; hearing of this, Myrrheli managed to make his acquaintance, with the result already seen.

"Well, well," continues the Indian, "we are wasting time. Where is the child?"

"Asleep."

"Then rouse him. Time presses. I promised to be back in an hour."

"To-night? Well, so much the better. Myrrheli, here are the checks. I trust you, you see; but I rely on the fact that you know me. The child is in the next room. He will be ready in five minutes."

The boy is soon dressed—a poor, shrinking, trembling little creature, with a piteous look of persecution in his eyes, whom the schemers have bought from an Italian mother for a few dollars.

"Now then, sonny," cries Myrrheli roughly, "just look at me."

"Oh, please, please, father," comes from his quivering lips in broken English—they had commanded him to call

Myrrheli father—"don't look at me like that. My—my head aches so after——"

Myrrheli bends down, and, grasping the little fellow's chin, forcibly elevates his head till their eyes meet on a level.

A few moments thus, and the child's face becomes set, while his eyes assume a glazed, unnatural appearance.

"There, now we are ready. Hypnotism is a wonderful thing, is it not? Here's a child who doesn't know a king from a pawn, yet who will soon play chess with a skill which few masters indeed are capable of transcending. Come on, sonny; the carriage is waiting for us. Good-by, Philoston. If I find Harding too strong for me, then—well, we shall see. Depend upon it, we shall be a quarter of a million dollars richer by the time you see me again."

III

"So this is the prodigy, eh?" cried Dick Travis. "Well, if this bundle of dazed humanity can outgeneral Harding, I'm willing to lose my money."

The Indian bows coldly.

"Mr. Belvey has my checks," says he, "and yours, too. Now, let us proceed with the business at hand."

Harding sits down at a table. There is a smile on his face, which he vainly tries to suppress. He has decided for his part not to accept the money which he will win. It is hardly honest to gain where one ventures nothing.

"Sit down, sonny," says Myrrheli, turning to the boy. "This gentleman will play a game of chess with you, do you understand?"

"Yes, father," mechanically.

The board is prepared; and the move being drawn for, is won by Harding. A double stop-clock of the pattern ordinarily employed in matches of this character is placed in the center of the table. Myrrheli stations himself opposite the boy. No referee has been appointed; none is deemed necessary. The fifty or sixty members in the room group themselves so as to command the best possible view of the uneven battle.

Harding offers the king's gambit, which the child unhesitatingly accepts. At every move the boy glances up at his father, as if to seek in his face some token of approval; no one pays any attention at this. As the play continues, an expression of surprise diffuses itself over Harding's countenance. The child is certainly precociously clever. Of course, it is absurd to speak of equality between them; still—ah! the little beggar is spreading an elaborate net. Decidedly he has a remarkable future before him; at the odds of a rook the issue would be extremely doubtful. What! Another combination! A knight would adequately express the difference in their play. He is full of resources. Ah, at last! The little fellow has made a slip.

"Checkmate in five moves," announces Harding, sitting back in his chair.

Dick Travis' gaze falls on Myrrheli. Beyond a hardly perceptible pallor, there is nothing to indicate that he is affected by Harding's announcement; whatever his emotions, he holds them masterfully in leash.

The fifth move confirms Harding's statement; the boy has lost the first game.

The second skirmish begins. The boy opens with the Ruy Lopez attack. Of all openings, this to the ordinary player seems least attacking; but the child soon makes it evident that he understands wherein its potency lies. The spectators look alternately at the board, and at one another. Is it possible that this wee little creature successfully maintains the attacks, despite Harding's strongest defensive moves? As for the latter, the expression on his face has become almost ludicrous in its profound astonishment. A knight! He can no more give the odds of a knight to this boy than he can give it to Steinitz. Wait! What means the last move? Good heavens! There does not appear to be any way of escaping checkmate, except by sacrificing two pieces. He must think.

He glances up at the clock. But ten minutes to make the next seven moves. There's no time to analyze the position. The two pieces must go.

He pushes a figure, which has the effect of losing a knight and a bishop.

"Ah-ha!" whispers Travis to a neighbor, "I'll bet he has a gilt-edged combination up his sleeve; but the kid's a dandy."

Travis is mistaken. By several cogent moves the child compels the exchange of queens, after which his superiority of force enables him to win another piece, and finally at the twenty-eighth move to announce checkmate.

"Well, I'll be damned!" ejaculates Travis. A prolonged sigh that is almost a whistle quivers through the audience. Harding flushes. He feels unexpressibly humiliated.

When the third and deciding game begins there is visible a tense look of excitement on the faces of the onlookers to this remarkable exhibition. The smiles of derision are no more. In their place have come an expression of absorbing curiosity and intense interest. The room is cool and perfectly ventilated, but on the brow of more than one the beads of perspiration gleamed like the early morning dew on the forest brambles. There is an involuntary movement to crowd nearer to the table as Harding makes the opening move. Myrrheli stands quiet and confident. He had made a fatal miscalculation in the first game; but the second truly showed the relative strength of the players. Perhaps, after all, there will be no occasion to call his reserve powers into operation.

Harding's fourth move resolves the game into the Evans' gambit attack. The American has frequently defeated Tschagorin himself at this opening, and when the child accepts the sacrifice pawn, Harding feels confident of victory. The onslaught he institutes is terrific, but in vain thunders his batteries. The grand diapason of battle swells not louder from his ranks than from the ranks of the enemy. Shot is met by shot and stratagem by stratagem. Each plays slowly, warily, deliberately over every move, pondering the consequences of every variation. Myrrheli's eyes are glued to the board; not for a moment do they leave it. Five hundred thousand dollars depend on the issue of his game!

The end of the first hour's play. So far no advantage is discernible on either side.

With every move the excitement of the audience is augmented. Unconsciously one grasps another by the hand, and both press till the blood leaps to the nails.

Harding is playing his strongest. He has discarded the notion that he can offer odds to this marvelous little fellow, with the set expressionless face of a wax figure and the brain of a dozen Morphys. It is even doubtful, he confesses, whether, by playing his best, he can do better than draw. If he comes off victor he will accept his winnings.

But, wait! Let him think! Is there not a break in the ranks of the youthful general? The child's last move was weak, and—yes there is an opportunity for brilliant play. But he must first consider; a false step may prove irretrievable. Is the combination sound? No—yes—no—— It all depends on the child's next move. Will he see the danger in time? By heavens! He doesn't!

Harding looks up. He has won. No earthly skill can save the game. Of that he is confident.

His eyes rest on the clock. He has time to spare. One

after another he sacrifices first a knight, and then his queen; in exchange he takes one bishop, but he has secured a position wherein he can force checkmate with the residue of his pieces.

Harding perceives Myrrheli glancing at the clock, and follows the direction of the Indian's eyes.

"Four minutes to make the next four moves," Harding mentally notes. "More than enough. The moves are already determined. Altogether they cannot consume two minutes. On that fourth move, too, the checkmate will be an accomplished fact."

He so announces aloud.

Myrrheli's face has become livid; but he is very cool. He gazes intently into the child's eyes, and the latter's lips move for the first time during the match.

"Play!"

"Oh-ho! You will fight to the last, my little bantam, eh? Very good!"

The next move is made. Myrrheli tries to attract Harding's attention, but fails. Another move, and the third follows.

"Checkmate on the next move," says Harding.

Again the single monosyllable from the child:

"Play!"

Harding stretches forth his hand to touch the mating piece. Suddenly some solid object falls to the mosaic floor, causing a loud noise. Myrrheli, in changing his position to the other side, has dropped his heavy cane. Harding starts and looks up. He detests noises. Myrrheli's eyes are staring full into his. What peculiar eyes! He must have been in error when he had mentally characterized them as black. Now a dull, reddish fire lies smouldering in their depths.

He moves uneasily in his chair, but so fascinating are those burning orbs, that he neglects to finish his play.

Harding is distinctly conscious of a wish that Myrrheli would remove his eyes from him. The wish becomes stronger every instant. It never occurs to him to change the direction of his eyes. In the meantime the clock ticks the seconds away. But ninety seconds of the hour are now left.

"What the deuce is he waiting for?" mutters Travis, his voice husky with suppressed excitement.

And in truth, that is the question which agitates the mind of every person who has witnessed to-night's extraordinary exhibition. What is Harding waiting for?

The precious moments are melting away into eternity. But one minute left, and Harding seems unconscious of the flight of time.

Suddenly, however, a gleam of recollection penetrates the cloud-curtain of his slumbering will. He strives to break the strange, lotus-like charm that has enthralled his powers of volition. His hand goes forth an inch—two inches—hovers for a moment over the board like a frightened bird seeking fearfully some haven of rest, and then—heavens! Those fiery eyeballs have shaped themselves into needle-pointed daggers and are stabbing deep, deep into his brain. Pain, a far-off, spiritualized pain, whose seat seems an infinite distance away, quivers through his head for a moment. Then everything becomes confused; the individuality of surrounding objects are merged in a general indefinite mass, and the scene before his eyes gradually recedes from view, the outlines become fainter and fainter—smaller and smaller.

With a spasmodic jerk Harding rests his head on his elbow, and with furrowed brow begins to study the positions. What can he be thinking of? But thirty little winged messengers of grace remain for him. The $500,000 are already his; he needs but stretch forth his hand to take them. Is the man bewitched? Impatiently the tiny angels, one by one, soar swiftly away to the Infinite Past; but Harding pays no heed.

A silence almost palpable has fallen on the large hall. All are lost in wonder. But ten seconds left!

Travis can endure this no longer. His palms open and close convulsively, while his brow is suffused with a cold moisture. He draws a long breath, and, raising his voice till the room rings with the awakened echoes, he thunders:

"For God's sake, Harding, move!"

He knows that he ought not to have done this, but what cares he? Harding looks vacantly up and resumes his contemplative attitude.

The seconds drop one by one in the hour-glass of time, now are left eight—now five—four——

"Move, move, damn you, move!"

Two only are left—one——

Travis gives one agonized look at the clock.

"My God, lost by time-limit!"

ANTISEPTICS IN THE MIDDLE AGES

PEOPLE who are accustomed to speak of the "dark ages" would do well to read an editorial in the New York *Medical Journal* on the antiquity of antiseptics. It shows by quotations from those most authoritative books, Buck's "Growth of Medicine" and Gurlt's "Geschichte des Chirurgie," that the surgeons of the thirteenth century—which Doctor James J. Walsh has called the "greatest of all centuries"—not only practised antisepsis, but thoroughly understood that its object was the prevention of infection in a wound.

The term "healing by first intention" was invented by the surgeons of the thirteenth century. The first place in which it has been noted is a text-book on surgery, written by Dergo of London. A contemporary of his was Theodoric, whose father was a surgeon in the Crusades, and three of whose brothers were surgeons. He, too, wrote a book on surgery, and in it he describes the "pretty linear cicatrices" that come only after a wound heals without infection and that were commonly the result of his father's and brother's operations.

The false idea that pus was "laudable" and a necessary preliminary to healing, which was not discarded until after Lister's discoveries had been accepted in the nineteenth century, was already discarded by those surgeons of what the world is accustomed to call the "dark ages."

Gurlt transcribes Theodoric's description of the way his father and brothers treated wounds. A rather thick pledget of linen, preferably soft linen, was soaked thoroughly in strong wine and placed upon the wound, which was then covered with a series of dressings. The wine evaporated after a while, leaving the dressings absolutely dry. Theodoric, in language that reads like that of the late Doctor John B. Murphy or the Mayos or the great English and French military surgeons of to-day, deprecated much handling, probing or exploring of wounds.

He described also injuries of the skull, involving considerable loss of brain substance, which healed under this treatment. Other successful operations he described were on the nose, ear and throat, and the insertion of a tube in the intestines when these had been wounded.

The *Medical Journal* adds that "it would be quite impossible to credit such surgery, only that we have the actual text-book which was printed at Venice about the time of the discovery of America."

BILL REYNOLDS' PAPOOSE

By EUGENE SHADE BISBEE

ROY WILMOT REYNOLDS was his name in full, but upon coming to Wyoming and joining the boys of the "S wrench" outfit, he had dropped the first entirely, and cut the other two down to plain Bill Reynolds. He was a strapping big fellow; but one glance at the fair skin, untouched as yet by prairie winds, told of the "tenderfoot," and the boys were all ready for their laugh when he tried his pony. Every new man is tested as to his horsemanship by being given the most vicious animal to ride that the boys' devilish ingenuity can secure, and—well, if he sticks to the one they pick out, he may congratulate himself upon instant recognition in the higher circles of "cowboydom," for your genuine cowboy dearly loves a good rider.

"As I live, the man had a papoose in his arms, and a live one at that!"

There were about twenty of us in and about the corral to see Bill tackle his pony on the morning after he came up from Rawlins with Bob Martin, our foreman. It was a small, wiry, black mare that had never known a rope or a brand, and while two of the boys choked her up to the "snubbing-post," two more blindfolded and saddled her. Her heels fairly twinkled as they flew out in her violent objection to the double cinch. But this sort of thing was an every-day matter, and she was soon in shape, and Reynolds beside her, as they led her out onto the open prairie, where there was plenty of room. Before any of us fairly realized it, he was on her back, and had reached over and snatched the handkerchief from her eyes. She made a pretty fight, and the boys howled and turned their guns loose, but never for a moment did Reynolds lose his grip on her, and the victory of mind over matter was a question of some twenty minutes, and the man was master—for the time being. Not until later did we learn that Bill was an expert polo rider.

From that hour Bill Reynolds was a popular man, and as he threw the saddle off the animal he had conquered, one of the boys pulled a bottle from his pocket, and stalking up to him, said: "Well, old boy, you did well; let's irrigate."

Reynolds raised his hand and smilingly warded it off with: "Thanks, my friend, but you'll have to excuse me; I came out here on account of that," and his way of saying it made him look a foot taller in the eyes of every man there.

"No harm, Bill," said the man who had proffered the whisky.

"And none done, Wilson," replied Bill, holding out his hand.

After that, if you wanted to find Wilson, you had only to look for Bill Reynolds, and *vice versa*. And they made a great team, both over six feet, and carrying around two hundred pounds of bone and steely muscle.

Twelve of us, including Wilson, Bill and myself, were told off to round up the foothills of the Wind River Range, and we left the crowd, who were going down the Sweetwater, at Independence Rock. This wasn't very many years ago, but nevertheless a railway had not been dreamed of, even as far as Woodland, and we were many a long mile from there, with Sioux to the north and east, and Shoshones to the west. Reservation restrictions were not as rigid then as now, and we had as much trouble

with Indian cattle-thieves as the storms and coyotes gave us. There was no open danger, but then there is always danger in the air an Indian breathes with a white man, and we kept a sharp lookout for marauders. "Buck" Adams and I doubled up, and of course Bill Reynolds shared blankets with Joe Wilson. Bill had managed to make Mike, the cook, think he had room in the wagon for a banjo, and we used to sit around the fire after supper and listen to him play. Bill was none of your ready-made players, such as may be heard in any country town, but a finished artist, and he brought music from those strings such as none of us, who had only heard the regulation ranch twang, ever dreamed lay dormant in them. He sang in a full, rounded baritone voice, and from a seemingly inexhaustible repertoire. He seemed happy in a superficial sort of way, but there was an undercurrent of sadness in everything he did when not in the saddle, and I dare say I was not alone in wondering where he came from, and what brought him out here, so far from his natural environment. Aside from his words on the day Wilson offered him the drink, I could think of nothing that could have driven him from home and friends to find a new life among a wild lot on the frontier. But then, men in our line are not usually gifted with fine perceptions, or great subtlety of speculative power. I do not think the others noticed this peculiarity in Bill as much as I did, but then, I had been an Eastern man myself, until—but I am telling Bill's story now, not mine.

We had had pretty good luck, and had got about four thousand head together, and were headed back toward the Sweetwater; we had not seen the first sign of an Indian, when one night we were camped on the south side of the Wind River Range in as pretty a natural park as ever the eye of man beheld. A stream, icy cold, and clear as purest crystal, flowed through it on its way to the river, game swarmed about us, and we had only to cut a willow and go to the creek for all the trout we wanted. The cattle were scattered over the valley, ranging two or three miles from camp, and Bill and I were to do night herd. So after supper we saddled up and cantered off. The nights were rather fresh, and the cattle showed not much inclination to wander. We rode slowly around them, driving in stray ones here and there, each going in opposite directions, and passing each other at nearly the same point every time in the circle of about two miles circumference. The night was starlight and almost cloudless, and I could occasionally see Bill on the opposite side of the herd. The Great Dipper had turned topsy-turvy, and I knew the dawn was not far away. Presently Bill came along, and pulling up, asked me for a match. I gave him one, and he was holding the flame to his pipe, when a series of yells rent the calm night air, and old as I was at the business, I felt my scalp creep, for well did I know the portent of that sound. We were stampeded by Indians, and before the match fell from Bill's hand the yells were augmented by the crack of firearms, and that vast throng of cattle rose as one and, transformed by unreasoning fear into so many mad things, plunged headlong into the night. The roar of Niagara, if brought side by side with that mighty tread, could never have been distinguished. There was but one thing to be done, and that is what we call "milling"—that is to turn the head of the stampede and start them going around and around in a constantly decreasing circle, until they gradually quiet down—and, leaning close to Bill, I yelled in his ear, and we started after them side by side. They had taken a course right out over the open prairie, thus saving the wagon from destruction, but the rear passed very near it, and as we rode furiously along in our attempts to overtake and turn the leaders, we heard a volley of shots from the direction of the camp. We had run our wild race a half-dozen miles before we finally got them turned and circling, and only then by killing a score in the lead; but the "mill" began to do its work at last, and presently they came to a dead stop and looked at each other, as if to inquire what it was all about. The boys from camp soon began to come along, and "Buck" Adams and Wilson were the first to show up.

"We got four of 'em, boys!" cried "Buck," as he got within hailing distance.

"Yes, and one's a squaw," added Wilson; "there were only eight or ten of 'em, an' the rest lit out for the hills; guess they hadn't calculated on the wagon bein' a feature of the show; you boys have had enough for one night, I reckon, ain't you? Better go on back to camp now; 'Buck' and me 'll take hold."

Accordingly Bill and I rode in the gray of dawn and found their words true. Four dead Indians lay within a few yards of each other on the open ground where they had fallen, and while I stood by the newly made fire Bill wandered off toward the bodies. It was all new to Bill. He had not been gone long when he came back with something in his arms, and stopping in front of me held it toward me. As I live, the man had a papoose in his arms, and a live one at that! It was bundled up in regulation Indian style, and its black eyes danced and sparkled as they regarded me wonderingly. Not a sound did it utter—I never yet heard an Indian baby cry; that seems to be an accomplishment only vouchsafed to civilization.

"Where'd you get him?" I asked.

"Found him strapped to his dead mother's back," he replied.

"And what on earth are you going to do with him?" I managed to ask.

"Keep him, I suppose; there's nothing else to be done."

Bill's voice, always so cheery, had the sound of an ache in it as he held the waif in his arms before the fire on that chill October morning. Its unconscious misery had struck the tender chord in his nature, showing to all of us the real man. His unspoken sympathy made itself felt by every one of us, and in an hour after the stampede there was not a man in the crowd who would not have died fighting for the helpless little savage whom Providence had cast amongst us. Bill cut him loose from the board to which he was fastened, and wrapped him up in his blanket. Then he got his horse and rode away. He was gone about half an hour, and there was a trace of a smile on his face as he came up with a canteen and poured its contents into the tin cup hanging at his side.

"I had to throw her and tie her up to get it," he explained, "but the kid's got to have milk"; and the roar that greeted his efforts when he tried to make the little thing drink awoke the echoes in the surrounding mountains.

"Why, Bill, how old do you think that kid is?" asked one of the boys.

"Look at that row of teeth!" cried another.

"Haven't an idea," answered Reynolds, suddenly looking up.

"Well, he's over two year old," said some one.

"Give him a piece of 'jerked' beef, and see him eat it; that kid don't want no milk."

Thereupon Mike gave him a piece of smoking hot venison. He reached and took it in great solemnity, and began to chew away on it for dear life.

After a while he got up and toddled around, eyeing things curiously, but seemed to soon feel quite at home, and conducted himself much after the fashion of his civilized kindred, all save by crying; he never cried. He became everybody's pet, and Bill actually cut a blanket in

half and made him a funny little pair of trousers and a shirt. We carried him along with us in the cook wagon back to the ranch, and although he was the admitted friend of all, yet he evinced a special fondness for Bill, and was known far and wide as "Bill's Papoose."

We had been back to the home ranch about a week; the baby had been installed as the *mascot*, when Martin interrupted the monotony of ranch life by announcing that one of the owners and a party of friends from the East would be up the next day. We were two days' drive from the railroad and were accustomed to these visits several times during the year; so along in the afternoon of the following day the party came; old man Barker, from Denver and his daughter, and two Cheyenne cattlemen and a Mr. Riverton, of New York, and his daughter. Barker had built a big, single-floor house not far from the ranch-house, where he used to sometimes bring his family and spend a part of the summer, and there the whole party was now quartered.

"Little Bill" had the run of the whole place and used to toddle about everywhere. He soon began to talk in that peculiarly disconnected way of babies, and had forgotten all the Sioux he ever had heard. He was just like any other baby, always in mischief, and forever getting into scrapes; a quaint little figure in blanket suit of bright scarlet, and tiny, moccasin-clad feet. I dare say he would have been called picturesque anywhere else, but we never thought of that—cowpunchers have the sentimental bump rather poorly developed.

He had been over to the cottage all the morning of the day following the arrival of the visitors, and about noon he came toddling across the open, and I went to meet him and carry him in. As I picked him up I noticed a small gold chain about his neck, and taking hold of it, saw that it secured a locket. Curious to see what they had given him, I opened it and looked upon a very fine portrait of one of the young ladies of the party—the one I supposed to be Miss Riverton.

Bill was standing in the open doorway as I came up, and I showed him the locket and its picture. As he looked upon the face his own turned white as death, but he held it in his hand for a moment, his fingers trembling strangely; then he stuffed it into the baby's neck and, without a word, turned and walked across the floor to his bunk. I could not think of anything to say, so I put the little one on the ground and turned toward the corral to think it over. There was a mystery here. Was this, then, why Bill had come West? I hadn't long to think, for the baby came out, and Bill was right behind him.

"Take care of the young one, will you, Jack? I'm going away for a while," said Bill, and passed on toward a pony tied near by.

As he mounted and rode away I turned toward the child, who was looking wistfully after him, and observed a small bit of paper dangling from the chain about his neck. Closer inspection showed it to be a letter, and it was addressed to "Miss Mildred Riverton."

This discovery made clear what Bill had meant by asking me to take care of the baby, and tossing the little letter carrier onto my shoulder, I made my way toward the cottage. I felt a strange delicacy about any one seeing even the outside of this letter, that was, I felt, intended for her eyes alone, and was more than glad to find the original of the miniature sitting alone on the porch.

I set the baby down and said: "A message for Miss Riverton"; and as she rose the little savage ran toward her as fast as his chubby legs would carry him, and she caught him in her arms with a rare, musical laugh, and then read the note.

Her face grew paler than had Bill's when he looked at her portrait, and I thought she was going to fall, and stepped toward her, but she quickly recovered herself—this fragile Eastern girl—and in a steady voice said: "You are a friend of his, are you not?"

I assured her that Bill, for it was he whom I knew she meant, had none but friends in our camp.

"Then you must go to him at once," she cried, subdued excitement in her tones; "he is in great danger—he has ridden away to destroy himself—ah, baby!" she vehemently cried, and snatching the marveling child to her arms, she pressed him close against her breast and covered the little brown neck with burning kisses, tears the while coursing down her cheeks.

Bill was in danger! I needed no second admonition, but ere the words had died from her lips was flying across toward the corral. Briefly explaining to several of the boys that Bill was in trouble and had gone away to perhaps make an end of himself, in five minutes six well-mounted men rode out on the open prairie, and striking the trail, broke into a run after the man who was running away from his friends. The trail was easy to follow through the sagebrush, and from its appearance he had evidently been going at a pretty sharp clip, so we increased our own gait, and in the course of half an hour were five or six miles away, and had not yet caught a sight of Bill. Straight ahead of us was a deep arroyo, and the trail led directly toward it. Every man among us knew it, and that there was no crossing nearer than three miles lower down. Was it possible, I wondered, that Bill had jumped it? Not a man of us would have dared to try it, and yet the trail led on straight as an arrow. Suddenly a horrible thought came into my mind, but I had not time to give it rein when we came to the edge of the arroyo and looked down, and the question that had half formed itself beheld its answer. There, at the bottom, thirty feet below us, lay Bill and his horse. The latter was stone dead. In much less time than any pen can picture it, three lariats were dangling over the side, and three men knelt beside their comrade. I put my ear to his heart and heard a faint thump—thump—the sweetest music that ever came to my ears. We swung a lariat about him, and a moment later he lay on the ground above, but as he was drawn up I saw his left leg dangle limply, and at once divined the cause. True enough, it was a compound fracture of the thigh. Well, we got him home, and he did not recover consciousness until he heard old man Barker saying to bring him right over to the house; but he was strong enough to protest so vigorously, insisting that he preferred his own bunk, that we took him where he wished. I had had some little surgical experience in an earlier portion of my career, and managed to set the leg and bandage it up pretty comfortably. Of course, the pain must have been awful, but Bill never winced, and save for his pallor you never would have known there was aught the matter with him. Just before sunset Mr. Riverton and his daughter came over and asked if they could see Bill.

I carried him the message, and he simply turned his head wearily toward the wall and said: "Ask them to come in."

The two entered the big room.

There was no one else there, and as Miss Riverton caught sight of the form on the bunk, she gave a little cry, and, running toward him, dropped to her knees, and, flinging her arms across his body, buried her face in them and shook with sobs.

I discreetly withdrew.

As I passed into the open air a piece of paper lay at my feet, and, picking it up, I began to mechanically read

some lines written on it, but my mind was wholly upon the scene I had just witnessed. Finally, however, the words burned their meaning upon my brain; I had become the unintentional possessor of their secret, for the note was the one Bill had sent by the baby, and read:

"For the sake of our old love, Mildred, take this poor baby and educate him—the boys here know his brief story. I am going away, and this time forever out of your sight, for the pain of knowing you, who loved me as I once was, to be lost to me for all time, is more than even my courage can face. I read of your engagement in a New York letter to a Chicago paper months ago, and, Mildred, I wish you joy unbounded, for a dying man can afford to be magnanimous, and if you are not already married to Tom Arthur, I hope you soon will be. Don't bother about me, Mildred; I did it all myself, and perhaps deserve my fate, but the bitter irony of it is the part that chokes. If you care to know it, I have not tasted the stuff that cursed me and dragged me down until even woman's love could not lift me up since the night I left you with that oath on my lips that I had taken my last drink. There are some papers of value—mining claim deeds and the like—in my box, that I wish you would take care of for 'Little Bill,' as they call him. That is all, but, thank God, I go to my last sleep with lips unstained and my soul clear. Good-by, Mildred, and God bless you. Roy."

In a little while Mr. Riverton took his daughter away, and I went back to see Bill. The color had returned to his face, a smile haunted the corners of his mouth. I held the note in one hand, a match in the other. Holding the paper before his eyes, I said: "She dropped it, Bill, and I didn't know what it was until I had read it; I was thinking of something else; no one else shall see it."

I struck the match and, as the paper flared up, Bill reached my hand and held it tight as he said: "God bless you, Jack!"

I returned the pressure and the wish—it was in my heart just then.

Bill looked me steadily in the eye for a moment; he seemed to want something, but before I could ask him what, he said: "Sit down here, Jack, I owe you something; I thought it was a curse for bringing me back, but since *she* came, it has taken the form of a blessing. Jack, we were engaged to be married; fortune was kind to us both; her gifts were lavish, and happiness lighted our pathway. But the set I lived in ran a fast gait, and before I knew it I was the leader in the race down-hill, while *she* was concealing behind a mask an aching, breaking heart. She gave me chances, times innumerable, to break away from the life I led and be a man for both our sakes. But the passion was stronger than love, my boy, and held me in heaviest chains. One night I went to her house drunk. She saw it instantly, and in that instant a look came into her face that sobered me; it was between a yearning, passionate love for the soul of Roy Reynolds and a shrinking loathing for the physical beast. I turned to leave her, then came back for a moment, while I said: "Mildred, I've touched the last drop of liquor!" Before she could reply I was gone, but I heard her cry "Roy" as the door closed. That was two years ago, Jack, and I've kept my word; but, my boy, don't think I'm a hero, for the shock of her look that awful night drove all desire out of me, and the very smell of the stuff now nauseates me. I thought she was married and that left me small desire to live; besides, I just *couldn't* see her again, it was too much! But she's been waiting and looking for me, and we are going away and we'll take care of "Little Bill" together. And that's why I say "God bless you, Jack!"

I wrung his hand in silence and left him alone in his new happiness.

In a week it was thought Bill could be moved, and of course he could get better attention on the railroad than way up in that country, and so an old government ambulance was resurrected, and a good bed made for him, and he looked mighty contented for a man who had had his leg bone stuck clean through the flesh. The different conveyances of the party got in line, and as they moved off on their long drive, the ambulance bringing up the rear, the last the boys saw of Bill Reynolds, he was lying with his head in Miss Riverton's lap, smiling a farewell to us all, while, standing at their side, waving a handkerchief in his little hand, his chubby, brown features a mixture of wonder and regret, was "Bill Reynolds' Papoose."

FIRST KNITTING MACHINE

THERE are a few touches of humor in the country-side revival of knitting, such as the overcharge bags and the envious feminine group about the lady who, with practised skill, deftly turns the heel of a sock; but behind it all is a fine display of service. When you see a sweater or muffler in process of evolution, it may interest you to know that the work is being done just about as it was when the art was in its infancy. There have been great improvements in knitting machinery, however, and the first of them was directly due to a somewhat common malady—unreciprocated love.

The Reverend William Lee, of Cambridge University, so the story goes, was deeply smitten with a maiden of his native town, Woodborough, Nottinghamshire; but in spite of his ardent wooing he could make no impression. The fair one calmly kept on with her knitting, then the common occupation of English women.

In revenge the Reverend William swore he'd invent a machine which would destroy the market for handwork. He kept his word; but Queen Elizabeth refused to grant a patent and to give her financial support, because too many of her subjects would be deprived of their means of livelihood. So the inventor took his machine to France. This story may be entirely fanciful, but in 1589 William Lee did revolutionize hosiery-making by producing the knitting frame, or stocking frame. American names in the list of those who have labored to perfect knitting machinery are W. C. Gist, Almet Reid and Griswold.

Knitting is not one of the oldest arts, being much less ancient than weaving. It is supposed to have been invented in Scotland in the fifteenth century, from which country it spread to England and France, soon becoming an established domestic industry.

American women at work to-day on sweaters and mufflers have an inspiring example for their war-time occupation—Martha Washington. Two Morristown women, dressed for a high social occasion, called soon after she joined the general at his headquarters there. They found her, plainly gowned, knitting as fast as her needles would fly. She gained the reputation of "an inveterate knitter," and every day, except Sundays, during the dark winter at Valley Forge, she gathered the officers' wives and all available women about her to knit gloves and socks, patch garments and make shirts for the heroes of the Revolution.

HOW I WAS TRICKED

By HERRMANN, THE PRESTIDIGITATEUR

"AND were you ever tricked yourself?" asked a young lady, one of a party to whom Herrmann was showing the elaborate details behind the scenes at the Harlem Opera House, some time before the great man died.

The magician looked grave a moment and then smiled—a kind of a before and after the funeral facial movement, as he answered:

"Well, yes, once I was badly tricked—so badly that the recollection of it serves to make me doubly happy while I am tricking others on the stage."

Pressed to relate the incident, the necromancer began:

"It was several years ago. A few friends, one night after one of my performances, asked me to sit in a game of poker with a young man and to manipulate the cards, thereby winning a sum of his money. They represented in justification that the lesson was necessary to cool his overwhelming vanity and boastfulness as a successful poker player. I agreed to the proposal, and it was part of the agreement that at the end of the game I should return the young man his money, with the information that I had played with picked cards, in order that the rebuke to his vanity should be more severe.

"I shall never forget the young man's appearance as he sat opposite to me in presence of his friends, awaiting his discomfiture. He was of the *jeuness doree*, with more money that brains. He had mild blue eyes and a baby face. He was as callow-looking a youth as could be found in a week of Sundays. He made but one stipulation at the beginning of the game, which was that we should use money and not chips during it. I readily consented, supposing his desire to display the roll of bills he exhibited as his only motive.

"How I did 'ring' the cards upon him! My skill in palmistry enabled me to give him whatever hands I wished. Of course, I had to let him win a dozen or two games with some pretty stiff calls to encourage him as we went along. But win or lose, he never changed his inane expression. He was the best loser I ever saw. At last, after two hours' play, I had about three hundred dollars of his money. I cried a halt. I told him of the joke that had been played upon him; of my manipulation of the cards, and how it was impossible for him to win a hand, except as I desired. At the same time I offered him back his money.

"If we were prepared to laugh at the young man's chagrin at being duped we were disappointed, for his superb bearing under the circumstances charmed us. He rejected the money offered with disdain; said he was no baby, and if he had stood in a game with a magician, he did it to win with his eyes open, or to bear his losses like a man without whimpering. He bowed himself out with the same complacent, innocent gaze he wore when the game began.

"We were in a dilemma truly, a contretemps not intended had happened in the joke. We had three hundred dollars of the young man's money, gained dishonestly. True, he was well able to bear the loss and refused to accept the money, but these conditions did not quiet our consciences over the affair.

"At last it was decided to donate the money to a charitable institution named, first deducting a sufficient sum to crush a bottle of wine or two with.

"The repast following was enjoyed with a keen relish, and I handed the waiter a twenty-dollar bill out of the young man's roll, with which to liquidate damages. As we were adjusting our overcoats preparatory to departure, the waiter tapped me on the shoulder, informing me that the cashier had pronounced the bill counterfeit. I felt a little mortified at the announcement, but not suspecting the real meaning of the occurrence, handed him without comment another twenty-dollar note out of the young man's roll. This was also declared spurious, and then the truth flashed upon me like lightning. Every dollar I won was a counterfeit. The young man's desire to use money instead of chips was apparent. He had appropriated my good money in the games I purposely lost, and substituted counterfeit in the games I won. And he had just one hundred dollars of my good money, besides my extra loss in standing for the wine.

"Of course, I had to acknowledge his cleverness as superior to mine, for I was beaten at my own game."

"And have you ever seen the man since?" inquired one of the party.

"Oh, yes; I frequently meet him on Broadway," answered Herrmann. "There is a kind of Masonic salutation between us as we pass. He pokes his tongue into his cheek and makes a motion with his hands as if dealing cards, and I double my fist and pass on.

"These signs translated mean that he is ever on the alert to ward off impending retribution, and that I am ever on the watch to catch him unawares."

PEACE MORE DEADLY THAN WAR

ON December 31, 1918, almost 2,000,000 Americans will have met with serious injury and 35,000 will have died in industrial accidents during the twelve months. These figures are based on casualty records of the accident insurance companies, extending over a number of years of careful study.

The most dangerous occupation is metal mining, and farming is the safest. Coal mining is second on the list of hazardous callings, sailors and fishermen are next, with railroading not far behind.

Unless the commercial traveler turned farmer, he could not find a safer work. Although much of his time is spent on trains, he meets with only half as many accidents as the clergyman. In fact, he is much safer on a railway, where he is carefully protected, than at home, where people fall from stepladders and tumble downstairs.

The number of homicides and suicides is increasing in this country. Statistics from past years show that during 1918 about 15,000 will die by their own hands, while 6,000 will be murdered.

THE RENEGADE DETECTIVE

A Serial Story

By RANDOLPH BADGER

CHAPTER SIX.

HE EXAMINATION.

ONE afternoon, toward the latter part of the month of September, as Camille sat in the drawing-room with Chiquita, a servant answered a summon to the front-door bell, and a few moments later ushered three men into the room. Camille's surprise was unbounded to see that they were Delano Joslin, Simon Jigger and Alexander Splofford, a notary.

"We've called, Mrs. Desmond, on serious business," said Joslin.

"Serious business—with me?" she queried, rising to her feet.

"Yes, madam, with you," he said politely.

"Pray, what can it be?"

"I come in the capacity of a local judicial magistrate," said Joslin.

"Magistrate?" she echoed.

"Exactly; this is a new position for me," said Joslin, "which I am happy to say my father, Daniel Fulton, your neighbor, procured for me recently."

This was said in such a significant tone that she knew it would be rash to dispute his claim to the title of "Harry Fulton," and, fully aware of her danger, she nodded acquiescingly, after the first shock of surprise had passed.

"Ah, then you are Harry Fulton?" she said sarcastically.

"Your servant, madam," he assented, bowing ironically.

"But you said you called in a judicial capacity."

"Unfortunately it was at the summons of this gentleman, Simon Jigger," pointing at the embryo detective, who made a flourishing bow. "There was the alternative of forcing you to come to the local courtroom under the accusation for public examination, or my coming here to retain privacy for you, and, with due deference to your sex, I chose the latter course."

"Under what accusation?" she stammered, growing red in the face.

"Mr. Jigger!" exclaimed Joslin, making a gesture to him to speak.

"It pains me, madam," said Jigger, "to do my duty; but I must accuse you of being, according to my suspicion, the murderess of Arthur Desmond!"

She uttered a suppressed cry and reeled back, while Chiquita sprang to her feet.

"I deny it!" she exclaimed.

"Your innocence will have to be proven, madam!" said Joslin.

She noted the sardonic smile on his face and saw him turn his head aside to avert the blazing glance of fury and withering contempt which Chiquita bent upon him. The Spanish woman was half-maddened.

"What!" she cried in tones husky with rage. "Dare you come here to sustain this charge? You who know——"

"Stop!" he interposed, raising his hand with a threatening look. "Enough!"

Chiquita grew calm as if by magic, when Camille caught her convulsively by the arm and whispered in hoarse, trembling tones:

"Remember your pledge!"

Not one action or word of what passed escaped Jigger.

The notary said nothing, but put pen, ink and paper on a table and sat down.

"We have come here to examine you," said Jigger.

"Very well, sir," she said resignedly; "proceed. If I am guilty of this crime let me be punished. But mark me, I will establish my innocence."

"I sincerely trust that you may," replied Jigger.

"You, then, are my chief accuser?"

"I am."

"Truly, your zeal to see me die a horrible death is a poor recompense for a kindness I once showed you," she said bitterly.

"Attribute my motive to the ends of justice rather than ingratitude."

"Well," she said, giving him a contemptuous look, under which he writhed, "go on with your disgusting work. I am ready."

Joslin sat beside the notary, Jigger stood a chair before the table, into which she sank, with Chiquita standing behind her, and Jigger took up his position near the magistrate and laid a roll of papers on the table, which Joslin opened and scrutinized in silence a few minutes.

Jigger and Camille were then duly sworn, and the notary stenographed the examination.

Joslin first questioned the detective:

Q—"Witness, upon what ground do you base your accusation?"

A—"Circumstantial evidence."

Q—"Will you state the meager facts?"

A—"I was present when James Thorn confessed that the accused was apparently guilty."

Q—"He is a government detective. Why did he not prosecute her?"

A—"I do not know."

Q—"On what circumstances do you base your allegation of the guilt of the accused?"

A—"Several suspicious incidents."

Q—"Which you witnessed?"

A—"Yes, sir."

Q—"Can you prove your assertions?"

A—"I can. On the night of June 3d the accused was absent from this house several hours, up to half-past eleven. Where was she?"

Q—"Mrs. Desmond, answer this question, please"

A—"I was out in the garden."

Joslin gazed at her sharply.

Q—"What brought you out in the garden at that late hour?"

A—"I refuse to answer."

Jigger—"My accusation is embodied in the statement before you."

Joslin selected one particular paper.

Joslin—"Mrs. Desmond, from half-past eleven o'clock until a quarter to twelve on the night of June 3d, where were you?"

Camille—"I was in the drawing-room when the clock struck at half-past eleven."

Joslin—"How long did you remain there?"

Camille—"About fifteen minutes."

Joslin—"What did you do after leaving the drawing-room?"

Camille—"Wishing to speak to my father-in-law on a matter of importance, I went up-stairs, and, approaching his bedroom-door, I heard a noise in his room."

Joslin (calmly)—"Describe it."

Camille—"Impossible; it sounded something like a struggle and a person being choked."

Joslin—"How do you know what sound a person makes when choking?"

Camille (confusedly)—"I do not exactly know; but I imagine the sound I heard emanating from Arthur Desmond's room was the sound of a strangling person."

Joslin—"Ah! Then you are not positive. Remember, you are under oath."

Camille—"I can only assert what I imagined."

Joslin—"Imagination is no proof, not extenuating. What then occurred?"

Camille—"A man issued from the room."

Joslin—"A man? Ah! Did you recognize him?"

Camille—"I did."

Joslin—"Then you saw his face?"

Camille—"No; I saw his figure. I heard his voice."

Joslin—"Are you quite sure that the voice and figure were sufficient for recognition?"

Camille—"As far as that goes, yes."

Joslin—"Could you identify this man by his voice and figure without perjuring yourself, supposing some other person imitated his voice?"

Camille—"Imitation could, very likely, be done."

Joslin—"In that case you half acknowledge that, as you did not see this man's face, it is possible that some one else may have imitated the person you supposed this man to be? In short, your identification is merely supposi-tory?"

Camille—"If I must admit your manner of logic, I am not sure of the man's identity."

Joslin (significantly)—"So in that case you could not conscientiously accuse a man who may, after all, be innocent. Am I right?"

Camille (surprised at his audacity and cunning)—"You are right, sir, in one sense."

Joslin (sharply)—"One sense—how?"

Camille—"This man's wife recognized him. I mean Chiquita Joslin here."

Joslin (coolly)—"Ah! I will examine her later. What occurred when this man appeared?"

Camille—"He thrust a package containing $25,000 into my hands, and acknowledged that he had robbed the safe in Arthur Desmond's room of $100,000."

Joslin—"Did Mr. Desmond usually leave his safe unlocked?"

Camille—"No; the safe was opened by the burglar with my duplicate key."

Joslin—"That is strange. How came he to have your key?"

Camille—"I do not know. I usually carried the key in my pocket."

Joslin—"Did you have it in your possession on the day preceding the burglary?"

Camille—"I did, for in a conversation relative to it, which I had with Mr. Desmond that very day in the garden, I felt it in my pocket."

Joslin—"Are you sure you did not open the safe yourself?"

Camille—"Posjtive!"

Joslin—"What then happened?"

Camille—"Chiquita appeared and recognized the man to be her husband."

Joslin—"That was peculiar. What did the man then do?"

Camille—"He escaped by climbing out the window of her bedroom."

Joslin—"Can you tell me how James Thorn happened to be present?"

Camille—"He was acquainted with Mr. Desmond and wrote him previously that he intended to make a call at Brierly. He appeared a moment after the thief escaped, accompanied by a dozen policemen."

Joslin—"A dozen policemen! What was he doing at Brierly with officers?"

Camille—"Searching for a criminal, he said, whom he supposed to be concealed about this house. The criminal was not here, however."

Joslin—"And he went away then, not finding his man?"

Camille—"He made some search, and departed."

Joslin—"Did he suspect any one of having killed Mr. Desmond?"

Camille—"Yes; he suspected me!"

Joslin—"And refused to pursue the case?"

Camille—"He had other work to do at the time, probably."

Joslin—"That will do, Mrs. Desmond. I will now examine Mrs.—— What is her name?"

Camille (arising)—"Mrs. Joslin."

Joslin—"Very good. I will examine Mrs. Joslin."

Camille resigned her seat to Chiquita, and eyed the magistrate with emotions of horror, admiration and detestation.

He was a man of nerve, and must have had a deep object in thus openly braving fate, beside which he certainly possessed the utmost confidence in her loyalty toward her husband.

Joslin really played his double rôle with marvelous skill.

He had much at stake, and, was he not sure of holding a secure position, he would not have had the consummate audacity to go on as he did. With keen perception he realized that, through her devotion to her benefactress, Chiquita would not expose him, for fear of making Ralph Desmond liable to rearrest. Besides which, as he (Joslin) had a delicate part to play, it was essential for him to secure himself with one grand coup that would forever protect him in the future. He had a distrust of the rusty Jigger, for he was an adroit, smart, penetrating and foxy fellow, whom it would be difficult to outwit without extreme strategy.

Camille gave her friend an imploring glance, full of mute eloquence, that almost told her to be guarded; and the Spanish woman, although almost beside herself with rage and mortification at the duplicity, replied to it by an equally as expressive look of assent as she was sworn.

She darted a glance of undying hatred at her villainous husband, and he, with brassy assurance, encountered it calmly and resumed his examination of another paper, which Jigger had prepared.

The rest of the examination was brief.

Joslin—"On your oath, did you recognize in the thief your husband?"

Chiquita—"I did. I have reason to know him; I saw his face."

Joslin—"Did you tell James Thorn who he was?"

Chiquita—"No; I fainted as soon as I recognized him."

Joslin—"You were frightened or startled?"

Chiquita—"Both. I immediately before had gone into Mr. Desmond's room and saw him lying dead upon his bed. He had choked to death."

Joslin—"You then were the first to see him a dead man? Are you sure he was choked?"

Chiquita—"I swear to it! Do you wish to know how I knew it? I will tell you. My husband on several occasions strove to strangle me to death; therefore I know by experience. Nothing could deceive me. I had a husband fit to become a public executioner, or a hired assassin! I know he is capable of murdering any one by whose death he could gain anything! If I can by any way, Sir Magistrate, be the means of bringing him to the gallows, it shall be done. And let me mention, sir, as your father is a rich man and Delano Joslin was seen in his neighborhood, look out for him. Joslin might find it to his advantage to strangle him, too."

The magistrate had assumed a difficult rôle for a man of strong passions, and, although he had almost perfect control over his emotions, which he learned constantly to school of late, it was with the most mighty effort alone that he prevented himself crying out in impotent fury. But he knew that the notary and the detective were watching him, and, to hide the purple flush that rushed to his face and the wild glare in his eyes, he stooped down his head into the palms of his hands, as if in thought.

When he had regained sufficient control over his faculties and was sure his face would not betray his feelings, he looked up and told her that she had said sufficient.

"There is something sinister in all this," he added, taking the notes from the notary and glancing them over. "The fact that you, Mrs. Desmond, were the only one awake, up, dressed and seen in the vicinity of the dead man's room, has a bad appearance, and it is not at all surprising that Mr. Jigger has theorized that you committed the crime. The facts, too, that your key was employed to unlock the safe, that a large sum of money, which you confess was a portion of that locked in the safe, was found in your possession by the government detective, your mysterious actions previously, and Mary Jones, the domestic, and Patrick Brady, the groom, seeing you, one with a man in the reception-room, who escaped, and later another man in the hall, who also escaped, and wandering out in the yard with no known purpose, are very suspicious. Moreover, Mr. Jigger saw you send a note to the Red Shield tavern in a mysterious way by Mrs. Joslin. It looks like a plot to escape the penalty of a robbery. There is one extenuating thing which can justify you, if it is developed, as you will confess. You were seen with two men on the night of the murder. You must confess who the first man was, as he is not analogous with the second, and tell for what purpose you saw him in the reception-room."

"I will not tell," was all she said.

To confess that Sammy had brought her a note from her husband might prove disastrous to Ralph.

"Very well," he replied. "If you will not exonerate yourself, we must lock you up and put you on trial for this supposed murder."

"What!" she exclaimed, looking at him in astonishment. "Imprison me?"

"Madam, it is my duty."

"You would not dare!"

"Wouldn't I?" he muttered with a black scowl. "Then—exposure for your husband. I must sacrifice you or him to save myself. You must sacrifice yourself for your husband. There is no alternative. This case is publicly against you."

"It is fate! I cannot help myself! Yes; I will suffer for him!"

"Here, here!" suddenly interposed a voice, and Thorn stepped from behind a screen where he had been concealed for over an hour, listening to all that passed. "I think I have a word to say about this case, ladies and gentlemen; and, Mr. Henry Fulton, I think that I can upset some of your very nicely-laid little plans, if you will spare me a moment."

(*To be continued.*)

ORIGIN OF ODD TERMS

"BOLOISM," as a term of reproach, promises to break into the English language along with many other words never thought of before the war. Therefore the activities of the Kaiser's agent will probably be immortalized in future dictionaries, as were the acts of Judas and Simon Magus. Scattered through the English language are many words derived from proper names, some resulting from derogatory acts and some from just the opposite.

"Lexow," comparatively of recent coinage, is familiar to almost all New Yorkers as the name of the author of the State law which started one of the largest and most sensational investigations ever held in the Empire State.

"Gerrymander," from the name of a Massachusetts governor, has been used for more than 100 years in the United States to mean the division of election districts in an unnatural and unfair way for political purposes. It has been proved, however, that Governor Gerry was not entitled to the dubious honor of having the word named after him. John Fiske gives the origin of gerrymander in this way:

"In 1812, when Gerry was governor of Massachusetts, the Republican [corresponding to the Democratic in modern nomenclature] Legislature redistributed the districts in such wise that the shapes of the towns forming a single district in Essex County gave to the district a somewhat dragon-like contour. This was indicated on a map of Massachusetts which Benjamin Russell, an ardent Federalist and editor of *The Sentinel*, hung up over the desk in his office. The celebrated painter, Gilbert Stuart, observing the uncouth figure, added with his pencil a head, wings and claws, and exclaimed: 'That will do for a salamander.' 'Better say a Gerrymander,' growled the editor, and the outlandish name, thus duly coined, soon came into general currency."

"Lynch" is said to be derived from a Virginian named Lynch, who took the law into his own hands.

CURRENT NEWS

RAISES BIG TURNIP

Frank Hoffer, of Hingham, Mass., raised a turnip which measured 29½ inches in circumference and weighed 15 pounds.

WILL BOMB FATHER'S OLD HOME

"I'm going to fly back to Berlin, where you came from, dad, and drop a bomb somewhere near your old home." That's the way Lloyd A. Lehrbass, a student in the course in journalism at the State University, Madison, Wis., informed his father that he had enlisted in the aviation service of the United States Army. The father's reply to the message was: "God bless you, son. I'm proud of you."

MUD WOUNDS OFTEN SERIOUS

That mud could cause a serious, sometimes fatal, wound was one of the conditions at the front which most astonished Dr. George W. Chile, the Cleveland surgeon, now a Major in the American Medical Corps. A bullet striking the ground may throw up a splash of mud with sufficient velocity to penetrate the skin. The soil of France and Belgium is so highly fertilized that a dangerous wound often results.

WOMAN BUILT OWN HOME

Mrs. Pearl Elliston, woman carpenter of Commerce, Ind., has completed a comfortable cottage, which she is to occupy as a residence. Early in life the woman mechanic learned to be a carpenter and blacksmith as a diversion, and when scarcity of workmen promised to delay the building of a home she promptly rolled up her sleeves and proceeded with building operations.

The woman carpenter not only has constructed the cottage but is to make furniture for the home. She plans to paint it in the early spring.

PRAIRIE WOLF IN LOUISIANA

John Siple caught one of the largest prairie wolves in a trap on his farm northwest of Ida Grove, La., that has ever been killed in the county. The wolf, after he had been killed, measured exactly 64 inches from the tip of his tail to the point of his nose, and his pelt was one of the finest ever taken from an animal of that kind. Mr. Siple has shot and trapped over fifty wolves during the past five years, but this was the best fur hide that he has taken from a wolf.

GUARDS AGAINST SWINDLERS

Many times a millionaire because he is sole owner of the greatest strontium deposit in the United States, Joseph Ward, fifty-nine years old, of San Bernadino, Cal., has asked for and has two guardians to protect him against "them pesky swindlers." Ward told the court he didn't care about the millions, but didn't want the "swindlers" to get them. A typical "desert rat," Ward seeks only to wander on the vast stretches of the Mojave with his burro, he declared. The guardians will look after his business affairs.

HOURS IN MOTOR WITH DEAD

The most gruesome story of a blizzard's aftermath comes from Lansing, two miles north of Raymond, Ind. W. H. Sweat, superintendent of the Lansing Brick Company, fell dead shoveling snow. John Kueger was engaged to take the body by motor ambulance to Blue Island.

The motor stalled in the snowdrifts and for twenty hours, while the blizzard raged, Kuger was compelled to seek refuge inside the ambulance with the dead body before relief came to him. He had to take the covering off the dead body to keep himself alive.

KEEP BEES AND NEED NO SUGAR

The United States Department of Agriculture has started a campaign to stimulate bee-keeping. This is a real war economy measure, for honey can take the place of sugar, and there are absolutely unlimited supplies of honey in the flowers that grow wild all over the country.

Bee-keeping is very easy, says the Pittsburgh *Press*, and any man who goes about it carefully and with such elemental instructions as he can get from the Department of Agriculture can have a good crop of honey the first year and be able to laugh at the scarcity of sugar, besides making a profit by the sale of the product of his bees.

TOSSED INTO SNOWBANK BY TRAIN

To be struck by a freight train and hurled into a snowbank beside the track without being seriously or fatally injured, was the unusual experience of Robert Henry, a young man living near Colome, S. D. He was walking to his home, using the railroad track, when a freight train came along. It was cold and he was muffled to such an extent that he could not hear, and as it was snowing heavily the engineer also failed to see him. When Henry came to his senses he found himself in a deep snowbank some distance from the track. He does not know how long he was in the snowbank before recovering consciousness. He managed to make his way to a farmhouse.

FIRST WEDDING IN WHITE HOUSE

The first White House wedding ceremony in which the daughter of a President was the bride was performed ninety-eight years ago when Maria Hester Monroe, the youngest daughter of President James Monroe, became the bride of Samuel Lawrence Gouverneur. The bride was only seventeen, and was very pretty and charming as she stood on an American eagle which had been woven into a rug for the occasion, before the Rev. M. Hanley. Only the families of a few intimate friends witnessed the ceremony, not even the members of the Cabinet being invited. It was planned to follow the honeymoon of the happy pair with a succession of balls and other festivities in honor of the young bride, but Commodore Decatur was killed in a duel soon after the wedding and Washington was plunged into mourning. Simple as the wedding was, it is related that President Monroe spent several hundred dollars for the candles used to illuminate the White House on that occasion.

NEWEST OF STEELS IS EASY TO CAST

The English have just invented a high speed steel which is so strong that engines and guns and tools made of it can be worked more rapidly than those made of any of the other steels. The *Popular Science Monthly* says that tools of this steel can be cast into shape, and casting is the quickest known way of making any tool.

There are few steels, however, which by casting them do not become brittle. "Colbaltcrom steel," as it is called, nevertheless can be made in this manner instead of having to be forged and rolled, two very much lengthier and more expensive processes.

SAN JOAQUIN CROP PLEDGE

San Joaquin County, Cal., already ranking twelfth among all counties in the United States for crop production, has pledged its utmost endeavors for maximum production this year. The pledge came to the United States Food Administration in the form of a telegram from the San Joaquin County Farm Bureau.

Dean Thomas F. Hunt, of the College of Agriculture of the University of California, addressed a big mass meeting held under the auspices of the farm bureau at Stockton, Cal., recently. The California farmers went emphatically on record in support of all measures taken by the Food Administration and the Department of Agriculture to increase American production of foodstuffs, pledging themselves to do everything in their power to make 1918 a bumper crop year in San Joaquin County.

FIRST NAVAL BATTLE.

The first naval battle recorded in the world's history was that between the Corinthians and the Corcyrans, fought 2,572 years ago. Corcyra, the island off the coast of Epirus, now called Corfu, had been settled by Corinthians, and for centuries owed allegiance to the mother city. In 664 B. C. the Corcyrans declared their independence, and the Corinthians immediately prepared a fleet to reclaim their colony. The Corcyrans sent out a squadron to meet their foes. After a furious contest the Corcyrans emerged as victors. ' From that time on sea battles were frequent, and all of the petty states of Greece built navies. The enmities engendered by that first sea struggle resulted over two centuries later in the Peleoponnesian War.

OUR OWN "TROPICS"

Only at one place in the United States is there real tropical vegetation, says *Popular Science Monthly.* Florida and California have what is called "subtropical" vegetation. In the midst of a desert in the extreme southern part of California is a true oasis. The oasis, Palm Springs, lies 250 feet below the sea level. So hot is it there that there is a riot of vegetation all the year round. Enormous fig trees and mammoth grapefruit and oranges are always to be had. The lemons that grow there weigh two and a half pounds apiece. The responsibility for all this may be laid to a beautiful little stream which is fed by the Colorado River and which flows through the oasis only to disappear into the ground at its end.

ENGLAND LEVIED FIRST INCOME TAX

The first income tax imposed in England was provided for in an Act of Parliament 406 years ago to enable the King to enter on a war with France. In 1798 Mr. Pitt proposed and carried, after great opposition, a tax on incomes "as an aid for the prosecution of the war" against the same country. This law was repealed in 1816, but in 1842 Sir Robert Peel's income tax bill was passed. The tax was doubled in the Crimean War, and has often been increased to provide revenues for military operations. The United States imposed an income tax in 1863 to carry on the Civil War, in the same manner that Congress passed the latest measure taxing incomes in the United States to assist in financing the struggle against Germany.

MOTOR PARCEL POST

One of the biggest steps yet taken in the introduction of motor trucks as a city-to-city carrier results from the decision of the Post Office Department to establish numerous parcel-post motor-truck routes. These have already been surveyed and aggregate between 3,000 and 4,000 miles in length, with shorter routes. One chain of routes extends from Portland, Me., to New Orleans, and another through the Middle Western States, while still other routes connect principal cities on the Pacific Coast. It is hoped that the operation of these routes and of others to be established will materially aid in the distribution and in the lowering of the cost of food products. The Government has already advertised for bids for operating the new routes, and in case the proposals received are not satisfactory, the plan is to instal Government-owned motor trucks, operated by men in Federal employ.

FIRST POSTAGE STAMP MACHINE.

The first machine for manufacturing postage stamps was the invention of James Bogardus, who was born in Catskill, N. Y.

When the British Government advertised for a postage stamp machine in 1839 Bogardus was one of 2,600 competitors for the prize, which was awarded to him for his device. Before that he invented a new kind of clock, a "ringflier" for cotton spinning, an eccentric mill, a machine for engraving figures on watch dials and a machine for printing banknotes. In 1847 he constructed in New York for his own use a building entirely of cast iron, the first of its kind in America. He completed many other successful inventions and was at work on several ambitious schemes when he died in 1874. The Bogardus postage stamp press was first used in 1840, when penny postage was inaugurated in England. Stamps with gummed backs were adopted by the United States in 1847.

RINGS ON TREES RECORD THE WEATHER

Annual rings on trees serve as thermometers on which are recorded famine and flood, heat and cold, sunspot and other weather conditions which prevailed in the world hundreds of years ago, according to A. E. Douglass, dean of the College of Letters, Arts and Sciences of the University of Arizona, writing in *American Forestry Magazine.*

If there was a crop failure in New Mexico in 1689, it can be read in the rings of old trees just as plainly as if it were written on the pages of history; and a hot, dry summer in the valley of the Rhine would be recorded in the same way.

Dean Douglass has made more than 25,000 measurements to verify this conclusion. He has gone back for more than 200 years to compare his record of weather conditions in Arizona and New Mexico as revealed by the rings of many varieties of trees, with the reports of drought and freshet, fat years and lean given by the historian Bancroft in his history of the early settlement of that region.

The most striking correspondences occur with reference to the flood on the Rio Grande in 1680, the famines between 1680 and 1690 and the droughts in Arizona in 1748, 1780 and 1821.

HEIGHT TO WHICH ZEPPELINS CAN FLY

Basing his statement on accurate measurements of a Zeppelin that was brought down in England last October, on known facts regarding the lifting power of hydrogen gas, on the state of the barometer during the flight, on the temperatures of the air recorded in the airship's log, Jhadoo Jahoz writes in *Aeronautics* as follows:

"It would appear from the foregoing that the latest type of Zeppelin is designed to be able to attain a height of 17,000 to 18,000 feet when over its objective and after dropping its bombs, but is capable of going even higher under stress of circumstances and at the risk of suffering some slight damage on returning to its base. These conclusions accord well with Mr. Warner Allen's statements that these airships 'are built with a view to flying at between 16,000 and 18,000 feet.' Of course, on a short flight they could go higher, in view of the reduced quantity of petrol to be carried."

ELEPHANT CAUSED A WAR

Believing that Buddha lived again in the body of a white elephant, a devastating war was fought in the sixteenth century between Siam and Pegu for possession of the unhandsome animal. For a generation the struggle continued and in it five kings came to the throne, only to die together with thousands of their subjects. A white elephant is exceedingly rare, but is simply an albino and by no means snow-colored. In 1883 Barnum, not from a religious motive, brought one from Siam at a cost of $200,000.

Frequent mention is made of elephants in the history of ancient wars. The Roman armies fled at their first appearance in their early conflicts with the Carthaginians, but by the use of torches soon learned to break up a charge of the huge beasts. Alexander encountered them in his conquest of Asia.

The elephant looks stupid and his brain is small for his size, only as large as a man's, but it is highly developed and few animals are more intelligent. They are used as beasts of burden in India, where they are regarded with superstitious awe by their drivers.

TWO HUNDRED BRITISH PEERS IN ARMY

The Duke of Roxburghe, the first British nobleman of that name to be wounded in battle during the present war, is one of eight Dukes who offered their services to Great Britain soon after hostilities began. At last reports there were almost two hundred members of the House of Lords serving in the British army, including, besides the eight Dukes, ten Marquises, sixty-one Earls, twenty-two Viscounts and eighty or ninety Barons. A number of Peers have been killed and a great many more wounded in battle, while several other members of the British aristocracy are prisoners in the hands of the Germans.

The Duke of Rosburghe is the eighth to hold the title, which was created in 1707. His mother was a daughter of the seventh Duke of Marlborough, and he is thus a descendant of the victor of Blenheim and Captain General of England. The Duke succeeded to the title at the age of sixteen. In 1903 he married May Goelet, daughter of Ogden Goelet of New York. The Rosburghe estates consist of 60,000 acres in Scotland.

HOW THE DUTCH LOST NEW YORK

The first step toward making New York an English colony was taken 254 years ago, when Charles II. granted to his brother, the Duke of York, a large territory in America, to be called, in honor of the proprietor, New York. This included the Dutch settlement of New Amsterdam and the "colonie" of New Netherland. The Duke sent four ships against New Netherland, with Col. Richard Nicolls in command, to be Deputy Governor.

The Dutch settlers decided that it was useless to argue the case with the English invaders, "who were six times their number," and in the autumn of 1664 Fort Amsterdam and Fort Orange were surrendered. The name of New Amsterdam was changed to New York and that of Fort Orange to Albany. Gov. Stuyvesant swore allegiance to Charles II., but soon returned to Holland. New Amsterdam, founded over three centuries ago, had at the time of the English conquest a population of 1,500, while the total population of the province was about 10,000.

RUBIES AND DIAMONDS

Weight for weight, a ruby is more valuable than a diamond, and it is estimated that a ruby the color of a pigeon's blood and weighing five carats will fetch ten times the price of a diamond of the same weight. Furthermore, the price increases with the size of the stone.

Every precaution is thus naturally taken to prevent such precious objects being lost or stolen. When the "byon," or ruby earth, is dug from the mine it is placed in iron bins, which are then locked and transported to the sorting room at the surface.

Here the soil, which may contain gems worth a fortune, is tipped into "pulsator," a sort of perpetual motion jigger, which breaks the earth up and finally washes it away from the stones and rubble. The latter is then dumped upon the sorting table and is carefully gone over by experts.

Between sixty thousand and seventy thousand pounds worth of rubies are found at the famous Migok mine in Upper Burma every year.

LOCATING BULLETS

The telephone is now being used in military hospitals to complete the work of the X-ray in locating bullets and shell fragments deeply imbedded in the flesh of wounded soldiers. The body of the patient furnishes the magnetic current for the operation.

The apparatus consists of a head-piece, with two receivers, which fit over the surgeon's ears. One of the wires leading from the receiver terminates in a carbon electrode, the other in a fine probing needle. The carbon is placed in the patient's mouth and the needle gently inserted in the flesh where the X-ray has shown the fragment to be. The probe touches a bone, but no response comes over the wire. It goes deeper and brings up against a hard substance.

Instantly the surgeon hears a "click." His needle has touched a fragment of metal, completing the circuit through the patient's body. Slender forceps may now be inserted down the side of the probe and the foreign object removed.

A British surgeon, Sir James McKenzie Davidson, has devised a pair of forceps which may be used as a probe. They are so insulated that the click is heard only when the bullet or shell fragment is grasped between their jaws. He has also used the probing needle in operations on the eye, where the particle of metal had penetrated so deeply as to be invisible.

The idea is not a new one, for an unsuccessful attempt was made with an electrical device to locate the bullet which caused the death of President Garfield. Alexander Graham Bell, inventor of the telephone, afterward produced an apparatus for use in such cases.

OUR FORGOTTEN PRESIDENT

In the list of Presidents of the United States the name of David R. Atchison does not appear. Yet, in the opinion of many authorities on constitutional law, Atchison was certainly the incumbent of that high office for one day only. That day was March 4, 1849.

It fell on a Sunday, and Gen. Taylor, the President-elect, refused to be inaugurated on the Sabbath. In those days the President *pro tem.* of the United States was in line for the Presidency in succession to the Vice-President and President. David R. Atchison, Senator from Missouri, after whom the city of Atchison, Kan., was named, was then the presiding officer of the Senate, and hence, by this circumstance, became President of the United States from noon of March 4, 1849, to noon of the following day, when Gen. Tyler took the oath of office. President Atchison was born in Frogtown, Ky., and died in 1866.

SECOND-HAND RAILWAYS.

Junking railroads has become the regular business of at least one firm—a concern in a Middle Western city—since the war began to raise the price of metals and so to make profitable the sale of second-hand railway equipment. Much of the rolling stock and other material obtained from short lines, abandoned wholly or in part, has been sold to Russia and Central American states.

The firm referred to was formerly in the general junk business in a small way, but, in response to an advertisement, purchased at auction a railroad in Iowa consisting of forty-three miles of track, engines, cars, etc., says *Popular Mechanics.* On obtaining permission to dismantle the line, a large part of the movable effects were sold to Russia, while the balance of the iron and steel went to an Eastern manufacturer. The right of way was given to farmers whose land adjoined the railroad.

The profits from this venture were so substantial that the firm gave up its regular junk business and went into the career of buying railroads. The locomotives remaining on the lines which it acquires are usually employed in drawing the outfits sent out to tear up the tracks. These are the same as used in track laying, the operations merely being reversed, so that as the wrecking train withdraws it leaves practically nothing in its path.

PAYMENTS ON LAND ENTRIES BY SOLDIERS IN THE SERVICE

The General Land Office, Department of the Interior, has sent the following letter to the registers and receivers at all United States land offices: Where a person has entered or shall enter land embraced in an abandoned military reservation, for which he is required to pay a certain price per acre, and thereafter has entered or shall enter the military or naval service of the United States, the entry will not be canceled on account of the failure of the soldier or sailor to make the payments of any amounts falling due during the term of his enlistment, but it will be held suspended pending consideration by Congress of legislation designed to extend the time for such payments beyond the period of military service or the existing war.

The question whether such entrymen shall be required to pay interest, except as required by existing laws, will depend on the terms of the legislation which Congress may enact. In cases where the entryman has filed notice of his entrance into the military or naval service, as permitted by paragraph 8 of the circular of instructions of August 22, 1917, you will, nevertheless, call upon him for the payment when due, but will in your notice inform him that if he is unable to pay, on account of his employment in the military or naval service, he should advise you to that effect.

In all cases where there is response by him or on his behalf that he has entered the military or naval service you will forward the papers to this office with your report.

VEST-POCKET REPUBLICS

Pursuing the serene and untroubled tenor of their ways while the fate of the remainder of Europe is being decided at the cost of unnumbered lives are three vest-pocket republics which never figure in the news and are usually ignored by the mapmakers.

Of these, St. Goust is barely one square mile in area, being the smallest independent state in the world. It is situated in such an inaccessible part of the Basses-Pyrenees that it has never been worth the trouble of the surrounding powers to interfere, so its population of 130 govern themselves, as they have for the past 2,000 years, by a "Council of Elders," numbering twelve. The Council elects a President, who also acts as judge, assessor and tax collector.

Large by comparison is the republic of Andorra, which boasts of 7,000 inhabitants and is 150 miles from St. Goust in a remote section of the Eastern Pyrenees. Its people are pleasant-tempered, thrifty and hospitable, occupying themselves with farming, cattle raising, the sale of wool and charcoal, and smuggling. They are proud of their independence, which was declared by Charlemagne in the ninth century, and maintain an army of 1,100 to defend it. They are governed by a council of twenty-four, which elects a President every four years.

Larger than St. Goust, but with only seventy inhabitants, is the island republic of Tavolara, a narrow strip of land five miles long and half a mile wide, situated off the north coast of Sardinia. In spite of its size, it is a free and self-governing state.

Statement of the ownership, management, etc., required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912, of "MYSTERY MAGAZINE," published semi-monthly at New York, N. Y., for April 1, 1918. State of New York, County of New York:—Before me, a Commissioner of Deeds in and for the city and county aforesaid, personally appeared Luis Senarens, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Business Manager of the "MYSTERY MAGAZINE," and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication, for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 443 Postal Laws and Regulations, to wit:

1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher—Frank Tousey, Publisher, 168 West 23d St., New York, N. Y.: Editor—Luis Senarens, 168 West 23d St., New York, N. Y.; Managing Editor—None. Business Manager—Luis Senarens, 168 West 23d St., New York, N. Y.

2. That the owners are: Frank Tousey, Publisher, 168 West 23d St., New York, N. Y.; Harry E. Wolff, 168 West 23d St., New York, N. Y.; N. Hastings Wolff, 168 West 23d St., New York, N. Y.

3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None.

4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and condition under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona-fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

LUIS SENARENS, Business Manager.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 23d day of March, 1918.—Charles Warren Hastings. (My Commission expires January 30, 1919.)

GAINED 25 POUNDS IN 2 MONTHS

SINCE QUITTING

TOBACCO HABIT

SUCCESSFUL CONQUEROR ATTAINED AT LAST!

HJALMAR NELSON, (address on application,) whose photo appears at the left, learned of a book and other information being given FREE, explaining how Tobacco Habit can be conquered by oneself, safely, speedily and completely. He obtained the information and is now able to report a gain of 25 pounds in weight (from 163 to 188 pounds), as well as

A THREE DAYS' VICTORY OVER SLAVERY TO TOBACCO HABIT

HERE are more letters—voluntary testimonials. Though they are a small fraction of the thousands and thousands that can be produced, they are sufficient to show you what may be expected after the Tobacco Habit is overcome within 72 hours, by the simple Woods Method:

"While addicted to the tobacco habit, every muscle and joint ached, and I had almost given up business. I was **poor in health, weighing about 130 pounds.** Now **I am well, weigh 165 pounds,** and can work every day. I have **never wanted to chew or smoke since following the Woods method."**—A. F. Shelton, (No. 199600), Pittsylvania Co., Va. (Full address on application.)

"I have **no craving for tobacco;** this I consider wonderful after having **used a pipe for 35 years.** I have **gained 12 pounds** in two months, which is very good **at the age of 59 years.** To say that the **benefits far exceed my expectations,** is putting it mildly. Anyone in doubt can **refer to me."**—John Brodie, (No. 153235), Wapello Co., Iowa. (Full address on application.)

"I had weighed as low as 128 pounds, never got over 135 while I used tobacco. **Now I weigh 156 pounds.** Everyone wants to know why I got so fleshy; I tell them to **follow Edward J. Woods' method for overcoming tobacco and find out."**—W. S. Morgan, (No. 11815 K), Cooke Co., Tex. (Full address on application.)

"I smoked for more than 20 years, but now I am proud to say that for the past nine months **I have no crave for smoking; I feel better and am gaining in weight** every month since I stopped."—William Crawford, (No. 206737), Philadelphia Co., Penna. (Full address on application.)

"May God bless you. I am feeling finer every day of my life—not like the same person. **"My appetite is better,** and my stomach is all right. **I can hold out in walking better,** my voice is better **and my heart is stronger."**—Mrs. Mattie E. Stevenson, (No. 230738), St. John Co., Fla. (Full address on application.)

"Have used tobacco in all forms (mostly chewing) **for 15 years,** using about a plug of tobacco a day. **I began following your Method** on a **Friday noon** and **after that day the craving for tobacco was gone.** I am always ready to praise you and the good work you are doing. I can also say that I have **gained nine pounds** in seven weeks, and **feel like a new man."**—Robert S. Brown, (No. 229852), Worcester Co., Mass. (Full address on application.)

"My husband hasn't smoked a single cigarette, and has no desire to smoke since following your method of quitting. He **looks like a new man**—the best I ever saw him. **He gained seventeen pounds,** and is feeling fine."—Mrs. Carl C. Rogers, (No. 224360), Iredell Co., North Carolina. (Full address on application.)

"I was using about one pound and a half of chewing tobacco a week, but since quitting through your system, **I have gained about 15 pounds, and have better health by far,** than before."—W. S. Powell, (No. 139149), Harper Co., Okla. (Full address on application.)

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Overcome that peculiar nervousness and craving for cigarettes, cigars, pipe, chewing tobacco or snuff.

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"I sleep well and have no more restless or nervous feeling. I am past seventy-eight years of age, and feel fine since adopting the Woods Method."

—John P. Monter (Photo above)
Civil War Veteran

(Full address on application.)

Edward J. Woods, WC-101, Station F, New York, N.Y.

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K. I. SHORTHAND

$5.00 Complete

Learn in 5 Evenings

Then Acquire Speed Rapidly

Try This

A girl soon learns to write by K. I. shorthand and may earn $10 to $25 weekly.

IF YOU **can learn** the lesson (at the right) within 5 minutes, you should learn the principles of K. I. SHORTHAND in 5 hours of spare time—after which acquire speed rapidly.

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Here's p and, this is o a Write the two together, and you have o pa

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I WAS BALD

FULL HAIR GROWTH NOW

From recent photograph of J. H. Brittain

AFFIDAVIT re HAIR GROWTH

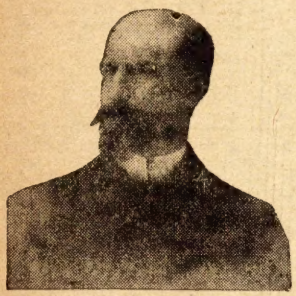
While completely bald on the top of my head as shown in my photograph which accompanying this affidavit, I adopted a hair cosmetic and formula given me by an old Cherokee Indian. Within six months my head was covered with a new and luxuriant growth of hair. I now supply Ko-tal-ko, a pomade prepared according to the original formula which resulted in my own hair growth. The statements in my advertisement are true and my photographs are correct.

John Hart Brittain

Personally appeared before me, John Hart Brittain, this fifth day of June, 1917, who signed the foregoing in my presence and who being duly sworn, attested that same is true.

SEAL

John Kleine
Notary Public



From former photograph of J. H. Brittain

In early manhood I was troubled with dandruff and my hair began to fall out.

Being naturally proud—call it vanity if you will—I used one hair tonic, lotion, etc., after another, in the hope of preventing the loss of my hair. Nothing saved my hair, however, and I resigned myself to the probability of lifelong baldness.

The engravings here printed are from actual photographs. The baldness was greater than apparent in the earlier picture as it extended over the back of my head.

In the course of my career, I had business with certain members of the Cherokee tribe of Indians and met a "medicine man" who gave me a pomade which I agreed to apply to my scalp.

To my surprise and joy, tiny hairs began to appear and gradually a growth of hair was developed all over my scalp. It was amazing to observe the improvement from week to week. A prolific hair crop resulted and has never left me although many years have passed.

RECIPE FREE TO YOU

The Cherokee wizard's secret or principle was imparted to me and I am willing to send the recipe free if you merely write, asking for it, enclosing stamp. Some marvelous results have been reported by both ladies and gentlemen. **The pomade is called Kotalko.** It is for men, women and children.

Kotalko is different from all the liquid lotions and hair tonics, washes, shampoos, etc. It is in a class by itself. It is to be applied with the finger tips where the hair is weak or where the scalp is bald.

YOU NEVER SAW A BALD INDIAN!

So positive am I that Kotalko is absolutely unsurpassed for aiding in hair growth that I offer it under **$300.00 cash guarantee.** You may obtain a box of **Kotalko** compounded according to the original genuine Indian principle, on receipt of $1.00, postpaid. Or, write for copy of the **recipe** (free) **with interesting book of facts,** to

JOHN HART BRITTAIN 150 East 32d St. (BA-101) New York City

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